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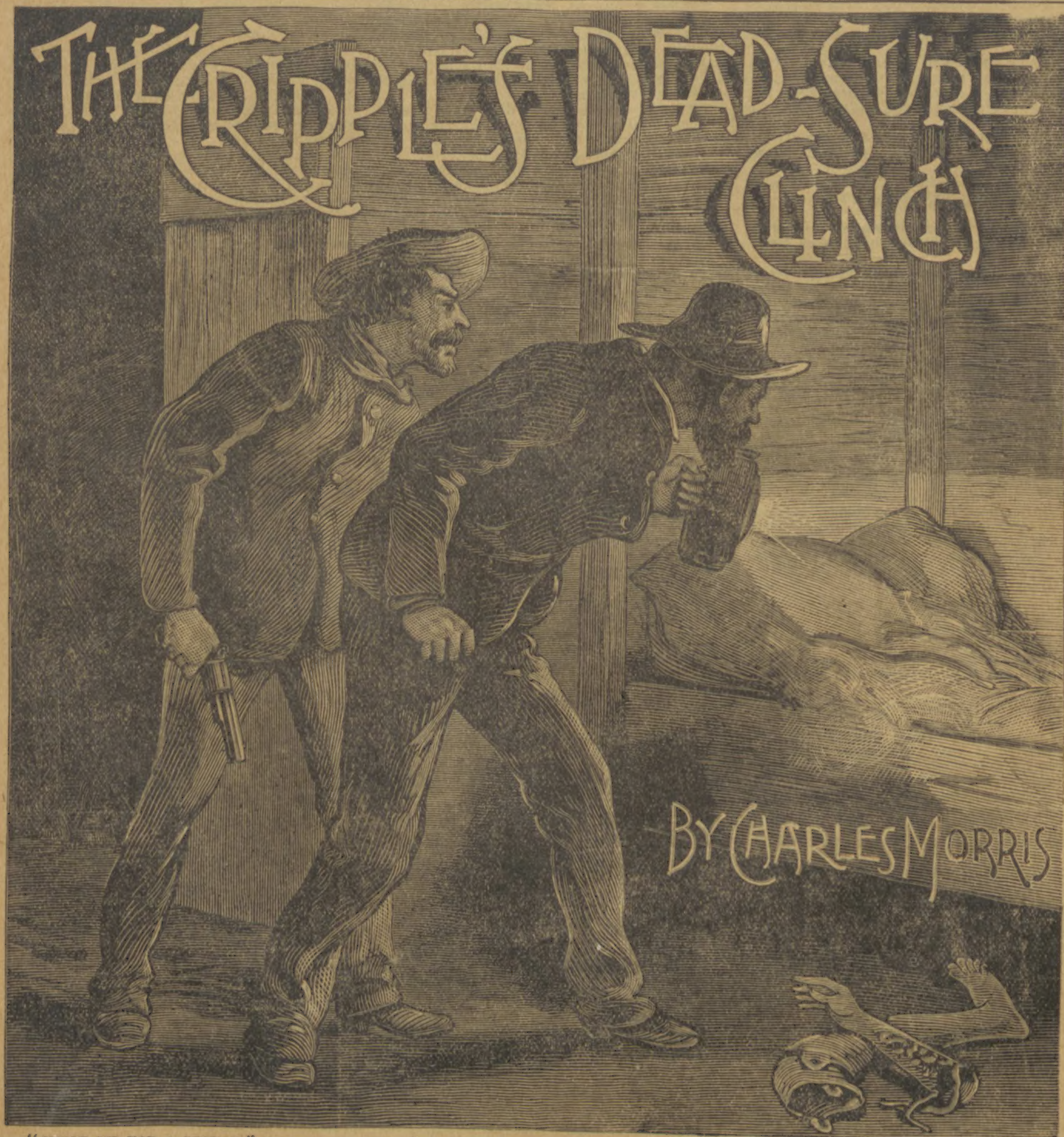
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"SHOOT ME FOR A PIGEON," EXCLAIMED BILL. "IF THEM BOYS AIN'T SLID OFF AND LRFT A LEG AND ARM BEHIND THEM."

THE

Cripple's Dead-Sure Clinch;

OR,

Trapping the Old Fraud.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MILL OWNER'S RAGGED VISITORS.

"MR. SOMERS in?"

This question was asked by a ragged and crippled boy, who stood in an independent attitude before a pompous and surly official, in the outer office of a large manufacturing establishment.

The boy had but one leg, the other being represented by a wooden "jury-mast," which did duty for a lost limb. Yet he stood in as sturdy an attitude as if there had been no lack in his make-up.

Behind him was a second boy, as ragged and disreputable as himself, whose limp and empty sleeve showed that he owned but a single arm. The two together made up but about a boy and a half.

"Haven't I told you he can't be seen?" answered the man sharply. "He has no time to see vagrants. You have been here every day this week. How long do you intend to keep this up?"

"Well, about three hundred and sixty-five days this year, if we don't see him afore," drawled out the boy.

"And three hundred and sixty-six next year, 'cause that's leap year," chimed in his companion.

"The deuce you do!" exclaimed the official. "Why, you ragged young bundles of impudence—"

"See yere, mister; don't shoot off afore you're cocked," interrupted the boy. "We're bound to see old squeeze-penny, and we've told you why, and thunder and lightnin' won't stop us. Help yerself to a cheer, Dick. This stool's 'bout my size. We'll wait."

"You impertinent gutter-snipe!" cried the man, in a rage. "If there's any more of this I'll have you flung neck and heels into the street."

"And break my t'other leg, and Dick's t'other arm, I s'pose. That'd suit yer ideas. But if you do I'll crawl here on my ten fingers, for I'm bound to see Somers."

"Mr. Somers, Andy; you oughter be more perlit," admonished Dick.

"They don't call me nor you Mister," rejoined Andy. "I dunno as they're made of any better sort o' clay nor we are."

The official looked at the persistent boys with some perplexity. Mr. Somers had positively refused to see them. Yet if they were to call every day for the next two years!—and they looked as if they might do it. In the end he turned sharply on his heel and entered the inner office.

Andy winked at Dick.

"Told ye so," he averred. "Old ramrod's a-weakenin'. There ain't nothin' like freezin' 'em out."

After a few minutes the man returned, with a relieved expression.

"Mr. Somers consents to see you," he said. "He is tired of your annoyance. Take care how you speak to him; you won't find him bear your impudence like I have."

"I'm goin' to speak to him with my wooden leg," answered Andy. "And Dick can talk with that empty sleeve of his'n. Ther' won't be no impudence in them, but I reckon they'll talk to the p'int."

The official led the way to the door of the inner office, and ushered the visitors in.

"These are the boys who wish to see you, Mr. Somers," he said.

The office was a large and richly-appointed one, as befitted the extensive business which it represented. Its center was occupied by a baize-covered table, behind which sat a thin-framed and sharp-featured gentleman, whose face was lined and wrinkled by business cares. There was a forbidding expression in his eyes.

"That will do, Mr. Jones." The official retired. "Now, what do you want?" he sharply asked. "I will give you a minute. That is all I can spare.—Lively, now."

Not a word in reply came from the visitors. Andy, who had seated himself, leaned back in his chair and thrust out his wooden leg. Dick

followed his example by holding out his empty sleeve.

Mr. Somers looked at them sharply.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

The boys still remained silent. The leg and arm were left to speak for themselves.

"You young jackanapes, I've had enough of this!" cried Mr. Somers angrily. "Say what you've got to, or I'll have you thrown out of the place."

"Mr. Ramrod, out there, said we was to keep our tongues in limbo, or we'd git fired," averred Andy, with a show of simplicity. "So Dick and I thought as how our leg and arm mought talk best."

"Ther' ain't no imperdence in 'em," added Dick. "And boys' tongues ain't to be trusted, yer know."

"I know you're a pair of young scalawags. Speak out, now, or get out. What are you here for?" Mr. Somers spoke very impatiently.

"We're here for justice," answered Andy. "I've got a leg to be paid for, and Dick's got an arm. It was your machinery tumbled on us, and scrunched our bones, and—"

"It was your own fault," broke in Mr. Somers harshly. "You were meddling where you had no business, and deserve all you got."

"That's a—" began Andy hastily. "What's the short word for 'fairy tale,' Mr. Somers? You know as well as you're settin' there that's a—not so. We was workin' where we'd been put, and it was your loose shaftin' that sp'iled us for life. Jist you bet, we ain't the sort to be bought off with a doctor's bill."

"We can't eat nor drink a doctor's bill," added Dick. "We've got to live, and I want to be paid for that arm which you tuk from me."

"And I for that leg," added Andy.

Mr. Somers sat looking for a minute or two intently at his visitors, his face working, but not with feeling. At the end of that time he sharply rung a call-bell on his desk. Mr. Jones quickly responded.

"Show these boys to the door," he said. "And see that I am not troubled with them again. They were hurt through their own foolishness, and I will not be held responsible.—Do you hear, boys? That is my final answer."

"Very well, Mr. Rich-man," answered Andy, bringing his wooden leg with a crash to the floor. "But if you think you're going to git rid of Dick Wilson and Andy Blake that way, you're bound to be the worst sold miser that ever made a dollar squeal. We've giv you the chance to do the square thing. We won't trouble you ag'in. But you'll hear from us, fer all that. Come, Dick."

He stumped angrily out of the office and through the large room adjoining, bringing his wooden leg down at every step with a force that almost made the clerks jump on their stools.

"That arm's buried," stated Dick, holding up his limp sleeve; "but the rest of me ain't. You're goin' to hear from the rest of me.—That's all, now."

He followed Andy, less noisily.

The mill-owner looked at his employee.

"Don't let those boys in here again. And don't trouble me about them," he harshly said. "If you do, you shall suffer for it."

He turned to the papers on his desk, while Mr. Jones left the office with a crestfallen look.

The attention of Mr. Somers to his papers did not last long. The door had but fairly closed behind the departing Mr. Jones, when he pushed them impatiently away, and threw himself back in his chair, with an exclamation that was almost an execration.

There was a show of pallor in his complexion, and a sharp eye might have seen the shadow of fear on his face.

"It won't do!" he said forcibly. "I dread that boy. Or is it the ghost of his father in his face! Great Heaven, how old deeds come back to haunt me! If the world knew—" He shuddered and grew silent, his face nervously working.

"What is to be done?" he resumed. "That paper is gone—gone! Who has it? Ah! if I knew I would crush him to the earth! That boy—he is the only heir of old Blake. If he were out of my way all would be safe. If it were known that it was my hand that loosened that machinery—that it was my hand caused it to fall! But, that is my secret, and must remain so. The boy lost his leg instead of his life; it is not enough; I want his life. While he lives, and that paper is out of my hands, all is in danger, my wealth, my business, my all."

There was a look of devilish malignity in his face as these words came with a hissing sound through his thin lips. The wrinkles on his brow seemed to twist and curl in the intensity of his

feelings till they looked like the outline of a demon's face. Had any one seen the aspect of the millionaire manufacturer at that moment, he would have been repelled with affright.

But this expression lasted only a moment. Somers had too much command of himself to let his face reveal his heart. The feelings which had come to the surface were driven forcibly back, and a look of satirical humor succeeded them.

"I hardly think I shall be troubled with those boys again," he remarked. "As for giving them the damages they want, I am not fool enough to arm my enemies against myself. It is easier to fight against a crippled beggar, than if I gave him a fortune from my solid earnings to work with. No, no, John Somers is not quite such an ass as that."

A crafty smile came upon his face. He turned to his papers again.

"Pshaw! why should I trouble myself about the boy? I have nothing to fear. Let him live; he can't hurt me."

He drew his chair back to the table, and plunged into the business before him, as intently as if he had not been just filled with darker and deeper thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHILE Somers, the mill-owner, was letting dark thoughts flow through his dark mind in his office, his crippled visitors were passing along the extensive brick building known as the "Somers Agricultural Works," in which the whirring sound of machinery told of busy and profitable industry.

Andy stumped along on his wooden leg with a downcast face. Dick followed him with more animation in his countenance. They continued their course till they had left the factory some distance behind them, and reached a quiet and lonely corner in the maze of streets which crowded that part of the town.

"Well, we giv him a starter, anyway," remarked Dick at length. "Now what are we goin' to do? Go for him?"

"Go for your gran'mother!" retorted Andy, stopping short in his walk, and turning to his companion. "It's all very well, Dick Wilson, to talk big in his office, but it's all blow; anybody with a grain of sense 'd know that. Empty pockets ain't got no show ag'in' full pockets, and half a boy ain't nowhere ag'in' a whole man."

"And it was all puff; and you ain't goin' to do nothin'?" asked Dick, disappointed.

"How much ha' you got to pay lawyers with?" queried Andy. "Tell me that, now."

"We mought pay 'em after we win."

"All right, hoss-fly; you hunt up that lawyer, and I'll chip in with you. But nothin' can't beat a million, nohow. Lawsee, he can buy up the judges, and carry 'em in his pocket. We got the right on't, Dick; but he's got the might on't; and that's heftier."

"And you think it's all for nothin'?"

"I wouldn't giv a chawed-up apple for our chances. We've tried to fetch him round to justice, but ther' ain't none in him. As for law—we look like it, don't we?"

He gazed at his dilapidated attire and his wooden leg, and burst into a satirical laugh.

Dick at the same time cast his eyes on his limp and ragged sleeve, and tears came into his eyes.

"It's too thunderin' bad, then," he avowed. "We'll never be good fur nothin', and we mought as well be dead."

"How's that?" spoke a cheerful voice near them. "Dead? Two hearty lads like you? Come, come, what sort of talk's that?"

The boys turned hastily toward the speaker. They saw before them a tall, sturdy, well-dressed man, with a face that appeared half-covered with whiskers, which seemed to bristle with good humor.

"Hearty lads!" Andy thrust out his wooden leg. "How's that for runnin' the race of life?"

"And how's that for swingin' sledge-hammers?" added Dick, showing his crippled arm.

"Yes, yes, I see; but if a whole man, like Somers down there," he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder, "can make a living, three-quarters of a man ought to make a living."

"Not where everybody's scrounging to dig his hands in the pile," rejoined Andy. "Jist you try it on. I'll trade legs and chances with you."

"Not much!" laughed the stranger. "Come, boys, I know more about you than you think. I have heard how a loose piece of shafting fell on you, in Somers's workshop, and lamed you for life. What has he done for you?"

"Paid our doctor's bills," answered Dick, sourly.

"Nothing more?"

"We've just been to see him, and he 'most kicked us out of the office," said Andy. "If you'd drop a twenty-ton steel hammer on that man he wouldn't bleed a red cent. That's the sort o' coon he is."

"Then why not bring a suit for damages?"

"And who's to hand out the spondulicks?" demanded Dick, shaking his pockets, which returned no jingle of cash.

"How came that piece of machinery loose?" asked the stranger.

"Nobody knows. It was just pure cussedness, so the foreman said."

"Carelessness, he meant, maybe; or purpose-ness." A meaning look came into the stranger's face. "Has John Somers any reason to be afraid of you?" he resumed.

"Afeard of me?" echoed Andy, at whom the stranger had looked. "He robbed my daddy, indeed;—leastways, folks says so;—but I reckon he don't keer a green persimmon for ten like me."

"Don't he? Come in here." The stranger entered the house before whose open door he was standing. The boys, much surprised, followed him.

He led the way to a room just back of the entrance, and placed chairs for his visitors.

"He robbed your father, you say?" The stranger seated himself in an easy arm-chair. "How? Tell me all you know about that."

"I've been told," replied Andy, "that I ought to have Somers's money. Folks say he stole the patent that he made all his cash with from my dad."

"No matter what folks say. What do you know about it, yourself?"

"Why, you see," answered Andy, looking the speaker intelligently in the face, "I was only a wee sample of a kid then. But I have heard dad say that Somers robbed him. And when he was found drowned—"

"Found drowned? Took water, did he? But what comes before that?"

"Why, they say that Somers paid for takin' out the patent; and that he got my dad bu'stin' drunk, and fooled him into signin' a paper, with two witnesses. That's how he holds the patent."

"The consideration money being that which Somers had advanced for taking out the patent?" asked the stranger.

"I shouldn't wonder but you knowed more about it than I do," grumbled Andy.

"No matter for that. Go on, and tell me what you know. Not what folks say."

"Well, I have heered dad say as he never signed that paper. But there was his name; and there was the witnesses. He kicked a little in the courts, but he got flung. Them witnesses come up and swore they seen him sign. Then he got kinder droopy, and fust thing folks knowed his hat and coat were found by the river-bank. He wasn't found. The tide had took what was left of him out to sea. That was twelve years ago. Since then my mother died, and I've been left alone to dig my way in the world—and now Somers has giv me this sort o' spade to dig with." He protruded his wooden leg.

"You remember distinctly that your father declared that he did not sign the paper?" asked the stranger.

"Yes. I was five or six years old then. He swore he never signed it. Remember? Why, I kin hear him now. He used to jist rip out what he thought of Somers. But, dad had too big a taste for drink, and he'd sometimes get so full that he didn't know beans from pork. I reckon he signed it."

"I am not so sure of that," said the stranger. The boys looked at him in surprise. "But to think so is one thing; to prove it is another. I tell you this, young fellows: you have a first-class damage suit against Somers, and you must push it."

"That's what I say," cried Dick, eagerly. "But Andy, here, says it's no go, 'cause we ain't got no money."

"Neither is it," declared Andy, positively. "Tain't in the wood, 'cept you kin show me how to turn cobblestones into gold dollars."

"There are easier ways of getting gold dollars than that," averred the stranger, with a laugh. "I think you have been treated shamefully, boys, and am going to back you in a damage suit against John Somers. I judge a leg and an arm are worth fifty thousand dollars apiece, and we'll put the damages at that figure. I'd like to bleed him, amazingly, and I think it can be done."

"How's that? You don't mean it?" cried Andy, in glad surprise.

"Tain't sound logic you're a-droppin'?" exclaimed Dick.

"Every word of it," answered the stranger. "Every word. I don't like John Somers; and I think you've been badly treated. He shall bleed, if there's any justice in America."

He brought down his hand on the table with a ringing slap, as he spoke these words. Dick sprang to his feet, too full of joy to contain himself, and danced round the room. Andy followed, his wooden leg threatening to bore a hole through the carpet at every step. Joy for the moment seemed to reign supreme.

"That will do now," said the stranger. "Meet me at three this afternoon at this direction." He gave them a slip of paper. "We shall see what a lawyer says about this business. Now, good-day."

In a minute afterward two happy cripples were making their way joyfully along the street.

CHAPTER III.

AN OATH OF REVENGE.

In the outskirts of the manufacturing town in which the Somers Agricultural Works were situated stood a small and very humble frame cottage, whose decaying timbers seemed hardly able to hold it upright. Yet all over it clambered running vines, which were just then covered by a wealth of green leaves, through which flowers here and there peeped. In the small piece of ground surrounding, flowering bushes grew thickly, the air being filled with their sweet odors. Nature seemed shedding her utmost charm on the decaying cottage.

One did not have to look far to see the presiding genius of this scene of leafy beauty. Bending over a rosebush in the garden appeared a graceful girl, dressed in cheap and faded calico, yet with a beauty of form and a wealth of golden hair that would have done justice to the richest garments. As she rose and turned her head she displayed cheeks that seemed to have caught their hue from the flowers she had been handling, while her face was of a beauty that the richest dame would have been glad to own.

Leaving the flowers she turned toward the house, with a merry burst of song from her rosy lips. She had not reached it, however, before she paused and turned, in a listening attitude.

"That must be Andy," she exclaimed.

"There's one good from his lost leg; you can hear him half a mile off! I do hope the boys have managed to see Mr. Somers this morning. I don't know what's to become of us all if that miserly wretch will do nothing for them.—Ah! there they come now—and looking as if they brought good news."

As she spoke these last words, Andy and Dick entered the little inclosure, with what seemed the haste of joy.

"What is the news?" cried the girl, running toward them. "Have you seen him? Will he do anything?"

"Do anything?" echoed Andy, stamping with his lame leg till it sunk three inches in the ground. "The bald-headed old miser! Why, when we was in his office, Kate, you could hear the gold dollars squealin' like monkeys in a cage. He pinches them so tight."

"Come, now, Andy, isn't that a little of a stretch?" laughed the girl merrily. "But did you get to see him?"

"We did. We told old stiffy we was comin' every day for two years. That skeered him limber."

"And Mr. Somers—"

"He'll let us pick up the shadow of a nickel, if we kin git our ten fingers round it; but he ain't pannin' out nothin' solid, nary time!"

"Is that so, Dick?" asked the girl anxiously. "Nothing at all?"

"Not as much as you could balance on the tip-end of a needle," answered Dick. "He heerd what we had to say, and then told us to git.—We got."

"Got?—You don't seem to have got much," she answered.

"Got our walking papers, anyhow. Talk o' pie-crust bein' short! Tain't a circumstance 'longside o' him, Kitty."

The girl looked at them in some perplexity. Their story did not seem to agree with their looks. What meant the show of joyful excitement with which they had entered the garden? The family was miserably poor, and starvation stared them in the face if Mr. Somers would do nothing for those who had been crippled in his works. What cause had they then for gladness?

"I know there is something more," she de-

clared. "You are keeping it from me. Dick, go in and tell mother what you've got to say. Andy, you come and tell me."

A meaning laugh passed between the boys. Then Dick turned and entered the house. Andy led the way through the garden.

"There is good news, Kate," he said. "Come, I'll tell you all about it. Shouldn't wonder if we discounted old Somers yet."

He walked through the rear gate of the garden. Beyond it lay a broad meadow, bordered by the street on which the cottage stood, while at a distance extended the more thickly-settled part of the town. On the opposite side of this meadow was a growth of straggling willows, and beyond that the waters of a narrow river swept their grass-grown banks.

It was toward this stream that Andy walked, followed by the curious girl.

"What ails you?" she demanded impatiently. "I've got work to do at the house. What are you bringing me here for?"

"For a walk," said Andy, perversely.

"You are a teasing wretch." She caught his shoulder and stopped him. "Tell me now. I'll not go another step."

"Yes, you will."

"No, I won't."

"You'll go on till you hear all I have to say. Then you'll turn from me like you would from a squeezed-out rag."

"Now, that's cruel, Andy. And it isn't so, and you know it."

"Don't mind my nonsense, Kate. Sit down here and I'll tell you all about it."

They were now at the brink of the stream. He seated himself on one end of a log that occupied the bank at that point. Kate took a seat on the other end.

"It's just this," Andy broke out suddenly.

"We've got a grip on old Somers that'll make him squeal worse than he makes the dollars. We've got backing, Kate. We're goin' to haul him up into court, and go for him to the tune of a cool fifty thousand."

"Is that what you brought me here for—to listen to fairy tales?" Kate queried, rising, and looking at him with a show of vexation.

"You don't believe it? Now jist come to anchor ag'in and listen. It's all as solid as a brick house. We're to see the lawyer this afternoon, and I reckon we'll open our batteries on the old miser afore he sees many more sun-rises."

Kate, her curiosity again aroused, resumed her seat, this time nearer to her companion.

Without further beating round the bush, Andy told his story, beginning with the account of their unsatisfactory interview with the mill-owner, which she heard with indignation, and ending with the story of their talk with the stranger.

To this part of the account Kate listened intently, her eyes dilating with surprise and hope.

"Well, that is strange!" she ejaculated. "You never saw him before?"

"Never as I know of."

"What kind of looking man was he?"

"A tall, stout sort of a chap. He looked good-natured—what you could see of his face for the whiskers. Well dressed, too; and took us into a handsome house. I think he means business."

"Men ain't so good as that, often."

"He hates Somers, he says."

"Oh! well, maybe that may be it. Hate goes a long ways."

"And love a short ways; eh, Kate?"

She blushed slightly as she turned her head away.

"I don't see that that has anything to do with it," she muttered. Then she sprang up hastily. "I must go to the house."

"You always run away when I talk that way."

"Then quit talking that way, and I won't run away."

"I know; you don't care for me since I've got a wooden leg."

"Oh, Andy!" Her voice was full of pain and reproach. "You know very well that I care ever so much for you; but you will talk nonsense.—There, now!" She flung her arms impulsively round his neck and kissed him heartily. "We've been brother and sister all our lives, Andy, and we'll be so yet."

"But we ain't brother and sister; and I'm growing up, Kate; and I love—"

"To talk nonsense," she interrupted. "Now hush; not a word more. You're only a foolish boy, and I don't know if you'll ever be anything else. Was it that you brought me all the way down here for?"

"No," he gloomily answered.

"What for then?"

"I'll tell you. Since I've had that talk with Somers, and with that stranger, to-day, I feel six years nearer a man. I never thought of it afore, but I believe now that greedy miser played a sharp game on my father, and druv him to drown himself.—This is where it happened, Kate. Here is where his hat and coat were found. From this very spot he jumped into the river and put an end to himself. He was as good as murdered by Somers—robbed first and murdered afterwards."

Kate started back with a suppressed outcry.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Jist what I say. He never signed that paper. And I'm goin' to prove it. I'm goin' to revenge him on that robber and murderer, and take from him the money he has made by robbery and bloodshed."

"Oh, Andy!" The girl's voice vibrated with surprise.

"I won't say love to you again, Kate. All I've got to say now is—revenge! When I get back the rights my father was robbed of, and make a beggar of that robber, maybe you'll be more ready to listen to me."

"That time must speak for itself," answered Kate, with dignity. "For the present—Oh, Andy!" she broke out, "can it be as you have said; and are you in earnest?"

"By the ghost of my murdered father, I swear to revenge him!" vowed the boy, kneeling on he log, and holding up his hand in attestation. "And by this wooden leg, I swear to revenge myself!" he continued, grasping his nearest limb. "Maybe he tried to kill me, too! Maybe he loosened that shaft so that it fell! Kate, if he did, by all—"

"Stop!" she commanded. "You are saying what no man can prove, and swearing vengeance for what likely never happened. If you take my advice you will give over all such foolish thoughts, and keep to what you can prove. If you get damages, that ought to be the end of it."

"It won't, then! I'll hunt him, the miser!" Andy set his teeth hard as he spoke.

He was on his feet now, facing the girl, whose face was flushed with the excitement of the recent events.

"And you, Kate. Has that stranger been here again?"

"Yes," she faltered. "I saw him pass the house and look in yesterday. But, he didn't stop, or speak."

"Let him, Kate. Find out what he wants, if you can. The blamed rascal! I believe Somers is in that, too."

"Somers is in everything," answered Kate, breaking into a merry laugh. "As for that man, Andy, leave me to take care of myself. If he should say or do anything I don't like, then I may call on you for protection. But till then—"

"If he insults you I'll break his ugly neck!" cried Andy savagely.

"Very well. Now I must go to the house. And don't you go and make a fool of yourself, Andy Blake!"

Shaking her finger at him in admonition, the lively girl hurried over the meadow homeward.

Andy, on the contrary, seated himself again on the log, and sat long in brooding silence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT DAMAGE SUIT.

JOHN SOMERS, mill-owner and millionaire, was treated to a disagreeable surprise. A summons was served on him to make answer why he should not pay damages in a suit brought against him for physical injuries done to Andrew Blake and Richard Wilson in his works through negligence on his part.

John Somers was not given to swearing—he was not of the kind that break out that way—but he came very near to an oath on receiving this legal document. He had reasons of his own that made this very annoying to him.

"Who is behind this?" he asked himself forcibly. "It is not those boys. They have the pluck, no doubt, but pluck without money does not count in court. There is somebody backing them. Who is it?"

He sat in reflection for several minutes, a look of annoyance on his face behind which lay darker shadows. He then rose and walked to the door of the outer office.

"Has Mr. Bryant gone?" he asked.

"No, sir; he is talking to the foreman."

"Ask him to be kind enough to step in here."

A natty, sharp-faced personage made his ap-

pearance after a minute, and took a chair in the inner office.

"Did you bring this document, Mr. Bryant?"

"Yes. Just served an hour ago. Thought you would wish to see it at once."

"Who is on the other side?"

"Clark, Phineas Clark. You know him. A good pleader in a damage suit."

"But, who is behind Clark?" asked Mr. Somers, impatiently.

"His clients, I suppose," answered the lawyer elevating his brows.

"His clients? No, no. They are a pair of half-grown vagabonds, who could not raise a retaining fee in a suit against a grasshopper. There is a dark horse in the ring, Bryant. Who is he?"

"Don't know," responded Bryant, shortly.

"Find out."

"I will."

"We must win this suit, Bryant."

"We will."

"I am not so sure of that," Somers shook his head. "The young rascals have something of a case."

"Have they? Then we must have the law and the profits."

Mr. Bryant looked meaningly at his client.

"You are not wanting in wit, friend Bryant," rejoined Somers, with a short, disagreeable laugh. "But to come down to business. This Clark, can he be managed?"

"Don't know. Might try. He is tough timber, though. Won't give easily."

"The witnesses are all in my employ," said Somers, with a meaning smile. "I think the weight of evidence will be on our side. There is only one thing I am troubled about—that dark horse."

"Trust me for him! He will need to be an expert in hiding if he escapes my eyes," assured Bryant, confidently.

"If found—"

"That will come after," interrupted the lawyer. "One job at a time. Now, Mr. Somers, to come down to the particulars of this case—"

And for the next hour the lawyer and his client were engaged in close and secret conference.

"There is another way," assumed Bryant, as he rose to go. "It might be the best way. Offer a compromise, eh? Buy off the plaintiffs? How does that strike you?"

"It won't work. They will want more than the court would allow them. And, besides, I have my reasons. They must be beaten. I must show fight; not weakness."

"Beaten they shall be, then, if cash and cunning can purchase law." Mr. Bryant thrust his hat firmly on his head. "Good-day, Mr. Somers. I hope to have that dark horse white-washed, so that you can see him, by to-morrow."

Mr. Bryant was too sanguine. To-morrow, and many to-morrows, came, and the dark horse still remained invisible. The astute lawyer used all the means at his command. He sought in vain to learn the secret from Mr. Clark. They were good friends socially, but Phineas Clark was not the man to be wheedled out of a business secret. It was a charity case, he said. The boys had been ill-treated, and he had taken up their cause from pure benevolence.

All of which Mr. Bryant, in his own mind, declined to believe. He knew his friend Clark too well for that. True, he might have taken the case on a percentage agreement, but this idea Mr. Somers would not listen to. There was a dark horse, he declared; that dark horse must be brought into the light.

The next step was to place spies on Mr. Clark and his two clients, to discover if they held conferences with any patron unknown. This, too, failed. They seemed to communicate with no one. Bryant at length became convinced that Clark's charity statement was the correct one, though Mr. Somers continued obstinate in this opinion.

The rich mill-owner had a reason for his obstinacy. It was one of his opinions that any lawyer can be bought. Yet Clark, as Bryant had said, proved to be tough timber. Hints of sure cash from the other side, were wasted on him. He worked the harder in his clients' cause for every hint.

"You see," said Bryant to his employer, "I have told you that you do not do justice to the honesty of lawyers. Clark is not for sale."

"Don't talk nonsense to me!" cried Mr. Somers, impatiently. "He has been bought; that's the trouble. There's money behind all this, and if you were sharp you would know by this time where it comes from."

"It comes from the air, or the ground, then,"

responded the lawyer. "Neither the boys nor their counsel have had communication with any rich unknown. I'll swear to that."

"Well, what next?" asked Mr. Somers after a minute's pause.

"The witnesses. Has the other side subpoenaed any of your workmen?"

"Yes."

"Who? Give me their names, and a statement of what they know, and send them to my office. I keep a school for witnesses, Mr. Somers. It is the most important part of the profession."

There was a look on the lawyer's face that seemed to speak of ways dark and secret in his profession.

"There are one or two doubtful fellows among them. The others will be easily handled," said the mill-owner.

"Doubtful ones? Are they good workmen?"

"Yes. Among my best. That makes them independent."

"Haven't you a better position to offer them? or an increase in wages? There are ways of getting the best of independence."

Mr. Somers bent his head in a moment's thought.

"Yes," he answered. "That might be done."

"Send them to me, then, after the promise of an advance in wages."

Unluckily for the injured boys, all the witnesses were men in Mr. Somers's pay. Their evidence was likely to be one-sided after the sharp Mr. Bryant and the unscrupulous mill-owner were done preparing them.

Mr. Clark, the opposite lawyer, was well aware of this, and worked like a beaver to make the most of a doubtful case. He had a strong argument in his favor—the crippled condition of his clients. A lost leg and arm would speak with a heavy weight to judge and jury. There was a splendid field here to work on the sympathy of the court.

Yet Clark knew well how cold evidence puts out the fire of warm eloquence. The living of the witnesses was at stake; would they be honest under these circumstances?

Just what line of argument Bryant intended to work, his opponent could not guess, but he was satisfied that a strong effort would be made to show that the boys had been hurt through their own carelessness. It was his purpose to show, if he could, that they had been injured through insecurity in the machinery, the result of negligence in the proprietor or the foreman of the workshop.

So time went on, until the day arrived for the case to be called in court. When that day came, Mr. Clark was by no means easy in his mind, for a sufficient reason. The other side made no effort to delay the trial. That was as much as to say they felt sure of their case. And every sign that they felt sure made Clark feel doubtful. He did not deceive himself. He knew well that he had no child's play before him.

It is not our purpose to weary the reader with the details of a trial in court. The case in question would not be particularly interesting on paper, however interesting it was to the parties concerned; and we will, therefore, hasten through it.

It had excited much attention. The courtroom was crowded—among the audience being that whiskered "dark horse" about whom Mr. Somers had been so troubled in mind, and whom Mr. Bryant had sought so vainly to discover.

He continued to occupy the background. Though evidently greatly interested in the case, he sat in a retired corner of the courtroom, and held no communication with lawyer or clients.

Eloquent opening speeches were made by the lawyers—and in great part wasted on the jury-men, who sat stolidly waiting for the evidence.

It was not until the witnesses came to be examined that the reason for the confidence of the defendants became manifest. Either the witnesses had been manipulated, or the plaintiffs had had no case to begin with.

Those hard-handed sons of toil swore strongly that the particular machine which the boys had operated was one that had given no trouble in its operation. It was worked by an overhead shifting device that was strongly bolted to stout timber beams, and could not have given way unless meddled with.

The machine worked easier when this shifter was loosened, but strict orders had been given that it must not be touched. All the witnesses swore positively that it could not have given way if it had not been tampered with, and one

of them added that he had seen Andy Blake "monkeying" with it.

As the trial went on the case seemed to go more and more against the plaintiffs. Mr. Clark put the two boys on the stand, and they testified that they had never interfered with the shifter, except one morning, when they had found it loose and shaking, and had tightened up the bolts.

As for loosening them, Andy pointedly asked the court if they thought he "looked like a fool." They must have been loosened, he admitted, but somebody else had done it.

This was a dangerous acknowledgment. Mr. Clark bit his lip nervously. The jurymen whispered with each other. If the shifter had been loosened, who would think of doing it but the boys themselves?

At this critical moment in the case the court was startled by the sound of a loud, sharp explosion that shook the stout walls of the building like an earthquake. It seemed to come from a distance, yet the noise was so sudden and alarming that many of the audience sprung to their feet and hurried from the room—among them the whiskered stranger.

Several minutes passed before the sharp buzz of exclamations and remarks were at an end, and the court was unable to settle down again to business.

Mr. Bryant then took up the cross-examination of the boys, and did it with such skill that he managed to confuse them, and to destroy the force of their testimony. When he had done, the jury seemed to believe that they had lied, and that it was they who had loosened the shifter. If so, the accident was their own fault, and they had no claim for damages.

At this point Mr. Clark sprung to his feet and begged the attention of the court. There were others of these machines in the factory, he declared. It was a question of fact. Would not the judge send an expert to the factory to examine these machines? It could be done while the case was going on.

"Your request comes somewhat late, Mr. Clark," said the judge, coldly. "If you wished to offer evidence in this direction you should have looked to it sooner. We have the testimony of a dozen witnesses to the effect that the machinery is secure. These are men of experience, whose own lives are in their hands. I cannot see that there is any room for question on this point."

While the judge was speaking, a number of the men whom the explosion had drawn from the court, returned—among them the whiskered stranger. Their return was followed by a momentary confusion, due to curiosity.

The whisper quickly ran the round of the court that the explosion was due to a dynamite bomb, which had gone off near the walls of the Somers Agricultural Works, where it had shattered the windows and done damage to the machinery.

While these whispers were passing round, judge and jury alike being interested in them, the stranger hastily wrote some words on a slip of paper, which he folded and sent by a messenger to Mr. Clark.

The latter opened it, and his eyes lightened as he read its contents.

"Your Honor has spoken very much to the point," he said to the judge, after order had been restored. "I therefore withdraw my request to send an expert to the Somers works.—It is no longer necessary."

"It is not? Why not?" asked the judge sharply.

"The question is settled," answered Mr. Clark blandly. "Those secure 'shifters,' which these honest witnesses swear are as firm as the solid earth, have become safe, at all events, for they rest upon the solid earth."

"Will the gentleman be kind enough to explain himself?" asked the judge pointedly. "The court does not pretend to understand riddles."

"I would simply say that the explosion, of which the court has just heard, has settled the question at issue. Nature has served as our expert. Three of those secure shifters lie at this moment on the floor of the factory—shaken down by an out-of-door explosion, and they are the only part of the machinery that has fallen. Your Honor may draw your own conclusion from this significant fact."

He stepped forward, and passed up to the judge the slip of paper which had been given him. The judge read it intently.

"This seems to alter the case," he said, "if it be so."

He spoke a few words in a whisper to an officer of the court, who left the room in haste.

"Have you any other witnesses to examine, Mr. Clark?" asked the judge.

"I have, your Honor. I should like to cross-examine Mr. Albine."

The man in question was one of Mr. Bryant's witnesses whose testimony had been given in a somewhat shaky manner. The news which had just been given to the court had evidently disturbed him. This Mr. Clark had seen, and questioned him so sharply that he grew confused and doubtful, and in the end gave testimony injurious to his principal.

He had been in the factory for five years; he had never seen the shifters tightened; some of them might be a little shaky; he had seen Andy Blake working at his, and thought he had—yes, was sure he had turned the wrench to the right.

"That was the way to tighten it up?" asked Mr. Clark.

"Yes—yes, sir."

"You are sure of that? Turning the wrench to the right was the way to drive the bolt into the timber?"

"Yes, sir. That would drive it in."

"That will do. You may step down.—I have nothing further to say, your Honor," he continued, turning to the judge. "The elaborate attempt to break down the testimony of my witnesses seems to have failed. I rest my case on this man's admissions, and on the testimony of the explosion."

The testimony of the explosion was quickly given. The officer whom the judge had sent out returned, and gave his report in a whisper to his superior.

"The statement given me by Mr. Clark is confirmed," announced the judge. "The shifters have been shaken down. No other important part of the machinery has fallen. Though I do not wish to interfere with the management of the case, I deem it my duty to give this information to the jury, in order that they may act intelligently on the actual facts at issue. The counsel may proceed."

In half an hour afterward the jury retired to deliberate on their verdict. The judge's charge had been strongly in favor of the plaintiffs.

CHAPTER V.

A PRECIOUS PAPER.

WE must now seek the scene of the explosion which had startled the court, and changed the whole aspect of the damage suit, while doing serious damage to the Somers Agricultural Works.

Mr. Somers had not been present at the trial. He had affairs of his own that needed his attention at his office that morning, and felt quite confident in his own mind that Mr. Bryant would gain a verdict in his favor.

"I would not care much how it went," he said to himself, "if it had not been for the awkward loss of that assignment. It is not the damages I may have to pay these young hounds, but what may come after. If they should question my claim to the patent, what have I to show? I had a paper—but it is stolen—that would not go far in court. It might be asked why it was not recovered."

As he spoke these words he was emptying the shelves and drawers in his fire-proof safe, in search of a business contract which was needed that morning, but had been mislaid.

This was an event that was not uncommon in the history of John Somers. He was wanting in system, and his papers often went astray in consequence. Hardly a week passed but he had to make some such search as this, though this morning he found the task unusually difficult.

"I can never keep things straight," he muttered discontentedly. "How if that patent assignment had been mislaid in this way! If it was stolen, why has not the thief been on me for blackmail?"

By this time the safe was nearly emptied of its documents. He thrust them hastily back. The paper needed was not among them.

"Hang it!" he growled, "where can it be? I have tried every place but that drawer where I never put anything but newspaper slips and other trash. I suppose I must look through it, though. Nothing is done till everything is done."

He drew out the drawer in question and emptied its contents on the table. It was a mixed collection of odds and ends that did not seem very promising. Yet out of it, as it lay, protruded the corner of a folded paper. This he drew out of the mass and opened. His eyes lighted up when they fell upon its contents. It was the missing document.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "who would have

thought it! How did it get here? No matter; it is what I wanted."

He struck the call-bell on his table. Mr. Jones quickly entered.

"Here, Jones, is that contract. Take it to Mr. Simmons, and tell him to write to St. Louis at once.—Well?" as Jones halted.

"That young girl is here again," he said. "The Wilson girl. She asks to see you."

"Pshaw! I can't be bothered! I am too busy, tell her.—No; send her in. I may as well end it. If she is like her brother, I will have to see her first or last."

As Jones left the room, his employer turned to the table, gathered up the papers in a mass, and tossed them back into the drawer. He was on the point of picking it up and returning it to its place in the fire-proof, when his eye fell on another carefully folded paper, which had been revealed in the turning over of the loose heap.

He drew it out, and started on doing so. Something in its touch seemed to send an electric thrill through his nerves.

"Good Heaven!" he cried. "Can it be! It feels and looks like—"

It was open before he had completed his sentence.

"It is!" he cried, joyfully. "It was not stolen after all. Another piece of my confounded carelessness—and of my accustomed good luck. Now let that suit go on. With this in my hands, I do not care a fig for its result! But I promise I will not lose this precious assignment so easily again. And, dangerous or not, it shall be put upon record."

The door opened as he spoke. He turned sharply and angrily, letting the document fall from his hand to the table. It was Mr. Jones who had entered, followed closely by Kate Wilson.

"Excuse me, Mr. Somers," he said. "This is the girl—the young lady—whom you bade me to admit."

"Yes. I had forgotten."

A more placable look came into Mr. Somers's eyes as he noticed the unusual beauty of his visitor.

"That will do, Jones. Now, miss, what can I do for you?"

"I am the sister of Richard Wilson, one of the boys who were hurt in your factory, sir."

"Yes, so Mr. Jones tells me. Take a seat, Miss Wilson. I am sorry for your brother, very sorry. Can I serve you in any way?"

"There was a balance of wages due him, sir. We are poor and need it. I hope you will excuse me troubling you—he has called for it in vain."

"Are you sure? There must be some mistake. We always pay to the cent."

"I am sure, sir."

"Why, certainly, if our books show anything in his favor you shall have it. And even if they did not I might make them show something. Such a pretty girl as you—"

"Sir!" cried Kate, springing indignantly to her feet. "I did not come here to be insulted, nor to ask for charity. I only demand my brother's due."

"Insult, child! Is it insult to tell the truth? As for the money—"

"You can keep the money!" exclaimed Kate, with flaming cheeks. "Or I will send some one for it to whom you will not dare to speak as you have to me!"

She turned with the air of an angry queen, and took a step toward the door.

"Stop, Miss Wilson! One mo—"

He was not able to finish the word. For at that instant there came a sound that seemed to rend their ears in twain; so sharp and piercing that it was like an arrow driven into their brains instead of a sound.

It had not ceased when the factory rocked like a ship on an ocean billow, the floor seeming to heave beneath their feet, while the door of the office burst open and a sudden blast of air swept through the room.

It was as much as they could do to keep their feet. Kate grasped a chair, turning pale as death. Mr. Somers supported himself upon the table. In a second there came a crashing noise, the breaking of glass, the fall of heavy masses. There were heard the cries of voices in loud alarm.

Mr. Somers ran wildly to the office door, too much scared to notice one result of the explosion; namely, the disappearance of his valued document. It had been taken up by the blast of air, and swept away from the table. The other material, having been replaced in the drawer, was not disturbed.

Kate Wilson followed him, as frightened as himself. They entered upon a scene of excite-

ment and devastation, greater than it would have seemed possible to produce in so short a space of time.

In the factory all was tumult, confusion and ruin. Not a pane of glass was left in the windows. Pieces of machinery lay here and there upon the floor. Tools and materials were scattered indiscriminately. Here and there men lay prostrate, hurled from their feet, some of them injured, others stunned. Through one corner of the large room daylight appeared; the wall was down.

"What is it?" cried Mr. Somers, in a terrified voice. "An earthquake?"

"Worse than that," answered the foreman, who stood near him. "It is a dynamite bomb. Some devil has tried to blow us all up."

"Who? What?" exclaimed Somers, staring round him in dismay. "Dynamite? He must be caught, then. After him, men; he cannot be far away. Lynch the rascal."

This suggestion did not need to be repeated. The men were furious at the dastardly attempt upon their lives, and in less than a minute fifty of them had streamed from the factory through doors and windows, and were dispersing in all directions in search of the bomb-thrower.

If they had caught him, or anybody whom there seemed good reason to suspect, his lease of life would have been short. They were too infuriated to stop to consider law and evidence.

But no fugitive was visible. On the contrary, hundreds of the townsmen were running in all haste toward the scene of the explosion, little less startled than the workmen themselves.

None of them had seen any person in flight. The villain, whoever he was, had been sharp enough not to be seen running from the factory. Likely enough he had concealed himself, and joined the approaching crowd. The case was not one for Judge Lynch; it would have to be left to the detectives to ferret out.

Within ten minutes after the explosion hundreds of people were around the factory, eagerly observing its effects and speculating on the cause. Among them were the people who had left the court-room.

Mr. Somers ordered the doors to be closed to keep them out of the factory. His effort was useless—there were too many open windows. In a minute the room was filled with curious people, prying, questioning, giving all sorts of reasons for the explosion.

The shattered remains of a cartridge case were found near the point where the wall had been thrown down. It had probably been placed there with a time fuse, giving the villain time to get away.

While all this was going on Kate Wilson had remained near the door of the office, pale as death from the fright she had received, resting her trembling hand on a piece of machinery.

The wheels were still revolving overhead, the machines still in active motion; the engineer had evidently become demoralized. But, at that moment they began to slow down, and in a minute more became still. He had returned to his duty.

The frightened girl walked to the nearest door. It was guarded by one of the workmen, whom Mr. Somers had placed there on duty.

"Will you let me out?" she asked.

"Can't do it," he replied, curtly. "Got orders from Mr. Somers."

"To let no one in. I heard him. He said nothing about letting no one out."

"That's so, miss; your head's level," said a man who stood near by. "And I don't think the keep-them-out orders come to much, to look there." He laughed as he pointed to the crowd on the floor.

"Orders is orders," said the man surlily.

"Nonsense! Come here, miss; we may find a door that is not kept by a fool."

He led the way across the floor, followed by Kate, to the opposite side of the room. The door here stood open, deserted by its warder, and people were coming in and out at will.

"That chap accepts the inevitable," said the conductor, with a laugh. "There is no use to guard the flood-gates when the banks are down. You may get out this way, Miss Wilson."

She followed him through the door into the open space without. He kept by her side as she walked away. When they had got some little distance from the building she turned and looked at him closely. She stepped back hastily on noting his face. It was that of the man who had been annoying her with his attentions!

"You?" she exclaimed.

"Is there anything frightful about me?" he asked. "What if I have admired you at a distance, Miss Wilson? A cat may look at a queen. I meant you no harm."

"Sir, you have annoyed and frightened me." "Then I earnestly beg pardon, and must protest that I did not intend to. I was interested in you, Miss Wilson, and for a good reason. It is in my power to help you and your friends."

"We do not want your help," she answered coldly, turning away.

"I beg you will not be hasty, miss. Andrew Blake is your friend, I think?"

"He lives with us," she replied.

"He has been robbed," answered the man.

"If he had his rights, yonder great factory should be his, not John Somers's! Suppose I should say that I can make it his?"

He spoke in a low, meaning tone. Kate turned, interested in spite of herself, and looked at him more closely. He seemed a man of about thirty years of age, rather good-looking, and well-dressed. The expression of his face seemed frank and confiding.

"What do you mean, sir?" she asked.

"What I say."

"You can—"

"I can do what I have said."

"And for what reward?"

"For your good opinion only, Miss Wilson. I admire and—"

"No more, sir!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"You are the second to insult me to-day. Do not dare to follow me, or I will call some of those gentlemen to my aid. And do not dare to speak to me again!"

She walked away, doubly beautiful in her insulted dignity.

"As you will, Miss Wilson," he replied, coldly. "Remember what I have said. The next to speak will be you; not me."

He turned and walked toward the factory, paying no further attention to her.

Half an hour and more after the time of the explosion passed before Mr. Somers turned away from the scene of devastation and walked back to his office. His fright and excitement had driven all thought of the document he had found from his mind. Now the memory of it returned to him.

He entered the office with a hasty step, thinking it important to place the valuable paper in a safe place at once. He stopped suddenly, with his heart throbbing wildly with alarm, as his eyes fell on the office table. The drawer with its papers was there. The document was gone!

For a minute Mr. Somers stood as moveless as a marble statue. Then he hastened forward and nervously examined the table, the drawer, the floor, the whole room. His search was in vain. The precious assignment had disappeared.

The baffled millionaire seated himself to think, resting his chin on his two hands, while his eyes continued to rove around the room in hope of a possible discovery.

"If the explosion had disturbed things here," he said to himself. "But, nothing else is disturbed. Let me see: There was a blast of air. That I distinctly recollect. Could it have—"

He sprang to his feet again and resumed his search of the room. One of the windows was raised a short distance. He lifted the sash higher and looked out. Nothing like the document met his eyes, and none of the people were near this end of the building.

"Pshaw! it is impossible," he muttered. "But drowning men catch at straws. It has been stolen—stolen this time surely. Some one has been in here. Jones!"

He advanced to the office-door as he called.

"Sir?" answered Mr. Jones, who stood in the outer office.

"Have any of those people been in here?"

"No, sir."

"No—are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. I have not left the office."

"You are mistaken. Some one has been here. Some thief."

"Some thief! But there has been nobody, sir—nobody but that girl."

"That girl? Ha! I forgot her! I left her here behind me. Can she? By Heaven, I believe it! It is she—she, that has stolen that paper! She shall restore it. Her house shall be searched. At once, before she can dispose of it. Jones."

"Sir?"

"Hurry to Police Headquarters. Ask the superintendent to come here immediately. Stay; I will go there. I want a search-warrant without delay. And by the way, Jones, is there any word from the court?"

"Yes, sir; this man is just from there." He pointed to a man behind him.

"Ah! do you bring news, sir? How goes the case?"

"The case is over," was the reply. "The jury were not out ten minutes."

"Ha! their verdict?"

"Their verdict is for the plaintiffs, Mr. Somers."

"The plaintiffs?"

"Yes, sir. You are to pay twenty-five thousand dollars damages to each of the injured boys."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAY AFTER.

"YOU kin bet the heaviest kind of hosses that old man Somers has been discounted bad this time," exclaimed Andy Blake, with a gay laugh, as he leaned lazily back in his chair, beside an open window of the Wilson cottage.

He kicked his wooden leg into the air to emphasize his words.

"Old timber-trotter, I reckon you're paid for, this time," he added.

"And you, too, old feather-lifter," chimed in Dick, waving his empty sleeve.

Mrs. Wilson was bustling about the cottage, getting things ready for dinner. Kate sat in the doorway, shelling peas from their own little garden.

"Fifty thousand dollars! My, we are rich as Croesus!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, with a flourish of her tin soup-ladle. "But it ain't none too much for a leg and an arm."

"It oughter be enuff to satisfy anybody that ain't quite a hog," averred Andy.

"I should think so," answered the good lady, with another flourish of her ladle.

"But I'm a full-grown hog; so I ain't satisfied," continued Andy. "The blazin' old miser tried to squeeze us; now it's our turn to squeeze him."

"Better let well enough alone," counseled Mrs. Wilson.

"Let well enough alone! You see me doin' it! What, when I've got the bulge on that old squeeze-penny! I reckon I will!"

"Me, too," chimed in Dick. "If you ain't got backbone enough, Andy, I'll lend you some of mine. After his comin' here last night, with the police, and searching Kate's pockets and the whole house for a paper—What was that paper, Andy?"

"It's something he's mightily worked up about. Maybe something 'bout the patent. What else makes him think Kate stole it?"

The inmates of the cottage looked at one another significantly at this suggestion. Kate indeed gave such a start that some of her peas rolled to the floor.

"I remember now," she said excitedly. "I was so scared that I forgot it. There was a large sheet of legal-looking paper lying on his table, covered with writing. I happened to look at it while we were talking and saw at the bottom the name 'Blake.' He says that Mr. Blake made over the patent to him. Can this be the paper?"

"Shouldn't wonder," cried Andy. "That's what makes him so anxious. If it is, and he's lost it—Jehosaphat! ain't he in a hole!"

"I remember more now," continued Kate, in such excitement that she spilled half her peas on the floor. "When the explosion came a blast of wind went through the office like a cyclone. It picked the paper up and carried it away. I can see it now flying through the air! It must have blown it somewhere where he cannot find it."

"If it did—" cried Andy, springing up.

"Come, Dick, I've got an idea."

"So have I," interrupted Mrs. Wilson. "My idea is, you had best pick up them peas you've made Kate spill."

"All right," said Dick, getting down on his knees, and beginning to pick them up with his one hand.

Andy flung himself at full length on the floor, and brought both his hands into play, laughing gayly the while.

"What is your idea?" asked Kate, curiously.

"To see Mr. Mordaunt; the man that's behind us, you know; and that Somers's lawyer ain't been able to twig, spite of all his tryin'. I want to tell him 'bout that paper, and see what he thinks of it."

"Better tell Mr. Clark, the lawyer," suggested Mrs. Wilson.

"Mighty good; we'll tell him, too. There's your peas! Now let's get, Dick."

"Are you going to say anything to them about Kate's adventure yesterday, and what that man said to her?"

"Don't say a word about it!" broke in Kate. "There is nothing in it, and I wish I had not

mentioned it. Don't say nor do anything about it!"

"Do nothin' 'bout it?" cried Andy angrily. "What sort o' timber do you take me for? I'm goin' to punch that feller's head if I come 'cross him. You bet on that."

"No, you must not," declared Kate.

"Yes, I must."

"You shall not, I say!" she stamped her foot in vexation.

"If I don't fetch him a wipe with a wooden leg it's queer."

"If you do I'll never speak to you again. I am able to take care of myself, Andy Blake! When I want your help I'll ask you for it."

Andy looked up in Kate's face. Her cheeks were red with excitement.

"Now she's mad," he declared. "Goin' to paddle her own canoe. Let's go, Dick. She'll be flingin' hot water on us next."

The mischievous fellow laughed so infectiously that Kate could not help joining him.

"All right," he said. "I won't hurt the chap. Dunno as I'm much of a figure for that sort of a job anyhow."

He looked down at himself.

"That is it, Andy; I am afraid you will get hurt. He is a strong, stout man, twice your strength."

"I bet his leg won't stand as much as mine," rejoined Andy, as he stumped out of the cottage.

"If both our legs was put in a coal-fire, I wonder who'd yell 'enough' first?"

"Go, if you're going," exclaimed Mrs. Wilson. "I'm tired of your nonsense. We can get nothing done while you're here. Be sure and come back in time for dinner."

"What do you take us for?" asked Andy, with affected indignation. "Nobody ever knowed us to forget our duty at the dinner-table; did they, Dick?"

"Not much," answered Dick, earnestly. "We're there, every time."

The next moment the two boys were making their way down the street, Andy stumping along bravely on his wooden leg, Dick's empty sleeve waving like a streamer in the wind, yet as light-hearted as if they were whole and sound.

Mrs. Wilson and her daughter stood laughing in the cottage.

"They are two as fine boys as there are in the State," declared the mother.

"That is true," acquiesced the daughter.

"And with the money the court has awarded them we will be rich, Kate."

"And happy, which is better than being rich," averred Kate.

Mr. Mordaunt, the backer of the boys in their suit for damages, had had reasons of his own for not appearing personally in the case. It was, perhaps, that he did not wish to be known as an open enemy of John Somers. He had, therefore, after his first interview with Mr. Clark, in which he paid him a handsome retaining fee to undertake the case, kept in the background, communicating with the lawyer only by letter. As for the boys, he had given strict orders that they should not come near him.

It was not surprising, under these circumstances, that Mr. Bryant had failed to discover the principal in the case. He had done his best, but the "dark horse" was much too dark for his eyesight. He had, in his own mind, come fully to the conclusion that there was no "dark horse," though Mr. Somers still held firmly to the opposite opinion.

It was with some surprise then, that on walking down Prince street the morning after the trial the sharp-eyed lawyer saw the two cripples enter a house on that street that seemed above the level of the houses at which they would be likely to visit.

"Who lives there?" said Mr. Bryant to himself. "Somebody with money, I should say; somebody above the level of those boys. But they went in with a kind of assurance. I must learn. Somers may be right after all."

He carefully took down the number of the house in his note-book and walked away.

He was right. The house was what Mr. Somers might have called "the dark horse's stable." The boys were at that moment in close conference with their useful friend and helper, Mr. Mordaunt.

"You've jist made us," declared Andy, gratefully. "And mind you, sir; we owe you every cent you've put into this case, and a handful of the balance. You've got to be paid for your trouble."

"A double handful," chimed in Dick; "one from both of us boys."

Mr. Mordaunt looked at them laughingly.

"Bless your eyes, boys, I've paid myself well," he said. "To pinch John Somers in his pocket

is worth to me more than it has cost. As for your money, you haven't got it yet."

"The judge said we was to have it," declared Andy, with some alarm.

"And the jury, too," added Dick.

"But Somers, three, didn't say so. He won't pay a cent till he has to. He'll appeal to a higher court, and make all the delay he can. Don't dance yet, youngsters; you may be two years from your money—if you ever get it."

"Ever get it?" echoed the boys in dismay.

"Just so. A new trial may go another way. I think you can win; but nothing is sure in law."

"Except the rascality of lawyers," broke out Andy, angrily.

"Not even that," laughed Mr. Mordaunt. "I fancy that most of them are honest men. But, business is business, even with lawyers."

"And a mighty scaly business, most of it," averred the vexed boy. "What are we goin' to do, Mr. Mordaunt? We'll starve a-waitin' on the courts."

"Can you not get work?"

"Work! What sort? I dunno what we're good for."

"There may be something you can do. I'll look around for you. Meanwhile, I might help you along a little on the strength of a future verdict in your favor."

"We'd sooner you'd get us somethin' to do," asserted Dick, earnestly. "We're not beggars, Mr. Mordaunt."

"No kicking in the traces, young fellows! I am driving this team, and I want you to mind the reins, and keep the bit between your teeth. No talking; you understand?"

"Mum's the word, eh?"

"That's about it."

"All right; we'll be as quiet as two crows in a cornfield."

"Or a brass monkey on a gate-post," added Dick.

"Very well. That's all, I judge."

"Not much," declared Andy. "It's not half."

"What do you mean?"

"We've picked up some funny bits of news, Mr. Mordaunt. We put out this morning to tell them to you or Mr. Clark. Reg'lar eye-openers. Old Somers has been showin' his hand."

"Eh! he has, has he? In what way?"

"I'll tell you."

Andy thereupon related the important events which had happened the day before—Kate Wilson's visit to the mill-owner, her glimpse of the paper signed "Blake," the explosion and the carrying away of this paper by the current of air, the visit of officers to their house with a search-warrant, and the thorough search which had been made, without result; he was about to add the story of Kate's admirer, and what he had said, but remembered in time that he had promised silence on this point.

Mr. Mordaunt listened to all this without a word, but with a close attention which showed that he felt it to be of deep importance. When Andy had finished, he sat in silence for a minute or two.

"She is sure that the name was 'Blake?'" he asked, at length.

"Sure as shootin'. No mistake in that."

"It must have been the assignment," Mr. Mordaunt seemed talking to himself. "If he has lost it—He must have done so; what else was he searching for? Did the officers say what they were after?" he asked Andy.

"Yes," broke in Dick. "I heard one of them say to another that a valuable document had been hooked, and that Kate had been there when it went."

"It must have been swept into some corner of his office."

"Don't believe it," broke out Andy suddenly.

"That man told Kate—"

He grew suddenly silent, biting his lip.

"What man? What did he tell?"

"Nothin'. I promised not to mention it."

"You must, if it is important."

"I told Kate I wouldn't; and I won't!"

"You think some man picked it up?"

"I went through that sort o' thing yesterday," said Andy obstinately. "Ain't takin' no cross-questionin' to-day."

Mr. Mordaunt laughed.

"Then I must ask Kate," he answered. "I must know what this means. The affair is too important to leave a stone unturned. I must know who that man is, and what he said."

"You won't from me," vowed Andy, setting his lips firmly.

"Nor from me!" echoed Dick.

"I'll have it, though. I'm a very fox when

I'm on the track of a secret. I'll tell you this, boys: if John Somers has lost that document he is in the tightest sort of a hole. It is not recorded—he knows why; if it is lost, we have him! But, the wind could not well have swept it out of his office; he may find it again. If there is a chance that anybody else has it, I must know. If Kate has locked your lips she must unlock them."

"Dunno if she will," answered Andy. "She's mighty obstinate, sometimes."

"But you can point me out the man?"

"Not without Kate says so."

"You're much too loyal for your own good," exclaimed Mr. Mordaunt in a tone of vexation. "I must and will know this secret. All my plans may rest on it. You may go now. And don't come here again. I don't want to be known in this business. If you learn anything, write to me. I will see you then if it is necessary. Good-by."

In a minute afterward the boys were on the street again.

CHAPTER VII.

A ROGUE AND A LAWYER.

A MONTH has passed since the date of our last chapter. During that period events of importance to our characters have occurred. Mr. Somers has not been idle. His factory is in full repair, and is running again as actively as if nothing had happened.

But the man who caused the damage is still at large. The police authorities, the detectives, the townspeople, have all been energetically on the look out for him, inspired by an offer of one thousand dollars' reward, but no trace of him can be found. He has done his work and kept his secret.

As for the missing assignment, Mr. Somers has not succeeded in finding it. His search of the Wilson cottage was succeeded by a thorough search of his office and its vicinity. But in vain; no trace of the valuable document could be found. It had vanished as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed it.

In the Wilson household all has gone well. Mr. Mordaunt has supplied the family with money for its necessities, saying that he would repay himself out of the damages awarded the injured boys by the court, when paid.

When paid! It was growing doubtful when they would be paid. Application had been made by Mr. Bryant in court for a new trial, on the plea of irregularities in the first. This application had just been argued and refused. The talk now was that the case would be appealed to a higher court.

Such was the outlook of affairs on a morning at the end of the period in question. John Somers, the mill-owner, sat in his office in moody silence, and with a look of doubt on his wrinkled face. His eyes were fixed on the opposite wall, while his fingers nervously tore a bit of paper to fragments.

"What can have become of it?" he at length muttered in low tones. "Fool that I was, not to record it! But I dared not while Blake was living. I was afraid to risk that paper to official inquiry. After he had drowned himself there seemed no use. There was only a baby to claim the patent. But that baby is now almost a man; the paper is gone, and there is nothing to show that it ever existed. John Somers, you have played the fool. If the Blake claim is opened again, what defense have you to offer? None, none!"

For awhile he sat like one lost in deep reflection, the look of vexation on his face slowly deepening into an expression of malignity.

"Only that boy stands between me and my wealth!" he muttered. "If he were gone—I tried it once, but in vain. He lost his leg, where I wanted his life. The next time there must be no failure—no failure."

Something like a shudder shook his frame, but his face had grown pitiless in its expression.

"If I had the paper I would not fear him," continued the schemer. "But that lost—all is at risk. That girl must have taken it! Sae was alone in the office behind me. It lay open so that the signature could be seen. No one else entered afterward. She has it—or has given it to the boy. What then? My years of labor are at risk! Shall a cripple's life stand between me and safety? No, a thousand times, no!"

A sound at the door at this moment caused him to hastily resume his usual attitude and to clear his face of the ominous look that lay upon it. It was Mr. Jones who entered, to announce that Mr. Bryant was without.

"Bryant? Show him in. Ah! how do you

do, my worthy sir?" as the lawyer entered.

"Help yourself to a chair. What news?"

"I have taken out the necessary papers for an appeal," announced Bryant, drawing up a chair to the table and seating himself.

"Are we safe to get it?"

"No trouble. It can't be refused."

"Then I hope there will be no more theatrical denouements. That bomb business settled the case before. Clark handled it skillfully. He turned the jury on that."

"Very true. They were shaken before though, by that witness who swore that he saw the boys tighten up the bolts."

"Albine, yes; the white-livered hound! I kicked him out of the factory the next day, as a warning to the others."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Bryant, with a look of dismay. "Why, hang it, Mr. Somers, is that your idea of business management?"

"What's wrong about that? What would you have me do?"

"What? Why, give the man the best place in your factory?"

"Reward him for treachery? Have all my other witnesses think it will pay them to turn on me?"

"Your other witnesses are not fools," answered Bryant, sharply. "You have made a dangerous blunder, sir. Albine did not tell half he knew. Clark got him nervous. I was afraid to take him up afterward. The spigot was open, and I was afraid that the wrong sort of liquor might flow."

"Ah! you think, then, I did wrong in discharging him?"

"Wrong? Worse than wrong! A blunder like that is next door to a crime. The fellow may ruin your case in another trial."

"I will put him on again to-morrow," cried Somers, hastily. "I was angry, and—"

"Wise men do not act when angry."

"I will send for him at once."

"Don't be too hasty. To show your purpose might be a worse blunder than the first."

"Very true. You have made me nervous, Bryant, by your confounded sharp way."

He rose and walked to the office door.

"Send Thompson here," he ordered. "I'll settle this affair."

A few moments later the foreman of the factory entered. Mr. Somers looked at him with contracted brows.

"I find that Tom Albine has been left off the pay-roll," he remarked. "What's the matter with him?"

"Why—I understood, sir—" faltered the foreman.

"Understood!—what?"

"Why—in fact—" the foreman fumbled his paper-cap nervously. "He spoiled a piece of work, sir," he continued, taking his cue, "and—"

"Spoiled work, eh?" Mr. Somers seemed to consider. "But, he is a good workman, Tom."

"Yes, sir; by no means bad."

"Oh! then we will have to look over this. Good men must be indulged a little. Put him on again. You might try him on that coultter job."

"But, that is the best job in the shop, sir!" urged the foreman.

"Well, he has lost several weeks. He will need good work to catch up. That will do, Tom?"

The foreman left the office with a look of perplexity on his honest face.

"How is that, Bryant?"

"Very well done. You must see that Albine has not such an inconvenient memory in the next trial."

"I will."

"I have another bit of news," resumed Bryant, facing Mr. Somers with a meaning look.

"En? what? Good news?"

"I have found the 'dark horse.' You were right. The boys were backed."

"I knew it!" Mr. Somers spoke jubilantly. "I was sharper than you there, at any rate. But the fellow did well. Who is he? What is he?"

"What he is is still to learn. His name is Mordaunt. He lives in a comfortable house on Prince street. Is a stranger in the city. Rented the house only a short time before the trial."

"Ah! a stranger? And took up those boys at once? That looks bad. Have you seen him?"

"Y-s. Got a glimpse of him yesterday."

"What is he like?"

"Tall; rather stout; full faced, what you can see of him, for he wears an immense crop of whiskers; not very old in face, yet quite gray; well-dressed, and gentlemanly in manner."

Mr. Somers listened intently to this description. At its close he shook his head with an air of disappointment.

"I doubt if I know the man," he said. "I must see him for myself. Meanwhile you must learn more about him. He must be traced. We must learn who he is, and what he is after."

"Trust me for that. I have the sharpest man on the force on his track now. I think we shall soon know more about him."

"Very good. Now about that appeal."

For the next half-hour they were engaged in close conference. Then Mr. Bryant took his leave.

"Very good, so far," said the mill-owner to himself, as he took his hat, "but I have my own part to play. Lawyers are of value as far as they go, but there is another class of gentlemen that are not without their use. I must see Martin this very night. That boy—"

He did not finish the sentence in words, but there was a look upon his face that spoke volumes.

His errand out, however, had nothing to do with "that boy." It was a business errand, merely. It needed the shades of night for the other work he had in hand.

That afternoon, as Mr. Somers was leaving the factory at his usual hour, he was accosted by the foreman.

"I have been after Albine, sir," he said.

"Albine?—oh, yes, I had forgotten. Well, have you put him on?"

"No."

"No? Why not?"

"Can't be found, sir. Has left the town. Struck out two weeks ago."

"En? Gone, has he? Where?"

"Don't know. West, his folks thought. On the tramp for a job."

"Well, we can't put him on if he's not to be found. That will do, Tom. If news of him turns up, let me know."

With a genial smile Mr. Somers turned away and left the factory. But a dark look came upon his face when he got outside.

"Have they removed him?" he muttered.

"He must be found. Bryant was right; I acted too hastily."

That night, at ten o'clock, Mr. Somers, so closely wrapped up that his nearest friend would hardly have known him, glided cautiously through some streets in the disreputable part of the town, and, after looking heedfully around him, slipped into a house that seemed among the least inviting in that shady district.

Here he remained for an hour. At the end of that time he reappeared, with his hat drawn lower, his coat buttoned higher than before, while a handkerchief in his hand concealed the most of his visage.

He hastened away to the more reputable part of the town.

"I can trust Martin," he said with an air of relief. "That chapter is ended."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BOIL AND A STEW.

THE night was a dark one. There were threats of rain in the sky, heavy clouds shut out moon and stars, and the street lamps of the town shed but a feeble light through the prevailing gloom.

In the part of the town which we now seek these lamps were few and far apart, with long spaces between them where the darkness was hardly broken. The traveler through those suburban streets had to pick his way carefully.

The only persons there at the moment in question were two boys, who walked along as easily as if it were full daylight. The place seemed thoroughly familiar to their feet.

The light of a lamp which they passed revealed the features of two persons with whom we are already familiar—Andy Blake and Dick Wilson.

Yet it seemed as if the light itself must be mistaken, for they certainly could not be the boys whose acquaintance we have made. No dumping sound of Andy's wooden leg rose on the air of the night. No empty sleeve swung free in the breeze from Dick's amputated arm. To all appearance they possessed four sound legs and as many arms, though their faces were surely those of Andy and Dick.

How was this? What strange transformation scene had been played? We must listen to the conversation of the boys, and see if we can discover.

"How goes it, old chap?" asked Dick. "Gettin' used to it?"

"Used to it? You bet! Feel 'most as if I was born to it. And I reckon you're pretty much in the same boat."

"Why, somehow I feel as if I could play baseball with my game arm."

"Tell yer what, Dick; they've got science down fine," affirmed Andy.

"Is that what they call science? Makin' arms and legs that go like clock-work?"

"That's what I call science."

"Then they got it down fine, sure. I danno much 'bout science, but I know it was mighty good in Mr. Mordaunt to buy us these continuations. Why, nobody'd ever know that there was a piece of you missin', Andy. Your new leg goes as natural as the one you had cut off."

"And your new arm moves so pretty that I can hardly tell which is the flesh and blood, and which is the steel and leather one."

They had now passed into a dark space which was almost beyond the feeble rays of the distant lamps.

"It's something to be built up new," affirmed Andy.

"To be patched out like a torn coat, so's a feller can't tell which is the coat and which is the patch."

"I begin to feel as if I was Andy Blake, all there again."

"And I feel like the old time Dick Wilson."

It is sometimes bad policy to speak your names in the midnight darkness. The two boys found it so, for hardly had the words left their lips when they were surrounded and seized.

Three stalwart men had suddenly sprung upon them, two from behind trees that bordered the roadway, the third from the corner of a building.

In an instant they were in the hands of those men, gripped with a strength far beyond their power of resistance.

"What's all this about?" demanded Andy.

"Let go, you footpads, or—"

"Shet up, youngster!" cried his captor, savagely. "Come along, and keep quiet, if you don't want to be hurt."

"Much I will!" exclaimed Andy, struggling energetically to escape.

But a sparrow might as well have sought to break from the talons of an eagle. His captor had twice his strength.

At the same moment a sharp call for help came from Dick's lips.

"Stop that chap's pipe," cried the fellow who held Andy. "He'll have the beaks on us."

In an instant more a bandage was drawn tightly round Dick's mouth, effectually stopping his eloquence. Andy was quickly served in the same way.

"Now off with 'em," cried the speaker of the party. "That yell mought fetch some bloody meddlers down on us."

The two boys were hurried from the spot; much against their will, but they were powerless in the hands of their captors.

A short distance brought them to the opening of a narrow street, which here entered the broad highway in which they had been captured. Into this the kidnappers turned, grasping the boys strongly by the shoulders, and pushing them down the dark and narrow passage.

After a hundred yards of progress in this direction, they stopped in front of a house which stood alone on one side of the way. Leaving the captives in the hands of his associates, the leader of the party unlocked and threw open the door of this house.

"In with the beggars," he commanded.

Andy and Dick resisted, but they were quickly half-pushed, half-carried, into the house by their stalwart captors, the door being immediately closed and locked behind them.

The passage in which they now stood was of midnight darkness. Not a ray of light illumined its intense blackness.

"Steady now, till I strike a glim," came in the voice of the leader.

There followed the sharp crack of a match, and a gleam of light shot through the gloom. In a minute more the steady luster of a lamp lit up the scene.

It revealed a narrow, whitewashed passage, a group of three ruffianly-looking men, whose faces were half concealed by masks, and two boys who were as badly scared as they had ever been in their lives. What villainy lay behind all this they could not imagine.

The bearer of the lamp led onward, his comrades forcing the youthful captives to follow.

A door at the end of the passage was thrown open, and they found themselves in a large, low-ceilinged room, which seemed to have been originally used as a kitchen, for an old-fashioned fireplace occupied a broad space in its rear wall.

Here a pile of logs was burning, and over it

hung a large caldron, which was steaming away as if filled with boiling water.

The captives were seated in chairs, to which they were firmly bound by short ropes. This done, the bandages round their mouths were removed.

"You kin talk now, if it'll do you any good; or yell if ye feel like it," declared the speaker. "You'll not fotch anybody if ye split yer blazin' heads off, I tell you that."

Instead of yelling, as they had been given liberty to do, the boys looked closely at their captors. They saw three roughly-dressed men, two of them tall and stout; the third, he who had spoken, of smaller, but wiry build.

Of their faces, only the eyes and foreheads were visible, the remainder being hidden by blackened masks. All that could be made out was, that they were men of low foreheads and fierce eyes, and that their heads were covered with close-clipped hair. That of the leader was of sandy hue; the others were dark.

"You boys is mighty 'commodatin', and we are much obleeged," said the leader of the gang, seating himself and looking the captives in the face, with a humorous wrinkle round his foxy eyes. "We moughtn't knowed you in the dark, if you hadn't told us yer names. Them was the names we'd been sot to nab, and we nabbed you."

"You were set to nab us then," answered Andy quickly. "What for? Who set you? What does anybody want us for?"

"We haven't any money," added Dick. "Our clothes ain't worth pawnin'. I don't see what you're 'spectin' to get out o' us."

"That's what gits me," asseverated Andy.

The three men looked at them, two of them with lowering visages—they bore the aspect of brutal, soulless ruffians—the third with wrinkles of amusement round his eyes.

"We mought get somethin' fur ye at the hospitals," he affirmed. "Jist to cut up for doctor's meat. Ye didn't know that was our bizness, hey?"

"You ain't goin' to murder us?" asked Dick, in alarm.

"Murder you? That's too ugly a word, young feller. We've got more perlite ways o' sayin' it."

"Shut up, Dick," said Andy. "Don't you see he's jist guying you. Come down to biz, old foxy; what did you fotch us here for?"

Andy had, by this time, recovered his old reckless daring.

"Ye're a sharp coon, sartain," answered the ruffian. "Well, I'm ready fur bizness, if you are. What we want is a paper which you've tuk possession of, and which you've got to fork over, or you'll git hurt."

"A paper?" asked Andy in surprise. "What sort of a paper? I'll sell you all the papers I've got for a nickel. Blame if I know what ye're drivin' at."

"Don't ye play that on us, youngster. It is a vallyble paper as was stole by a gal named Kate Wilson, that's sister to one o' ye, and was giv to Andy Blake or Dick Wilson to keep. Thar's the whole thing in a nutshell. We want that vallyble doc, or ye'll larn what sort of night-owls we are."

"I don't know what you mean," asserted Andy, bewildered. "Dick, did you hear anythin' of this? Did Kate have any such paper?"

"N't as I ever heerd on. I'm 'feered this feller's sittin' on the wrong eggs. Where'd Kate git such a paper?"

"From the private office of Mr. Somers, the rich mill-owner," answered the captor, looking keenly at the boys.

A change of expression came across their faces; they remembered Kate's visit to the factory, and the subsequent search of their house.

"You know more than you'll tell, you young rats," said the man savagely. "I kin see it in yer faces. Tell ye what it is, ye've got to show up, or ye'll be hauled up. Once more, I want ter know: are ye goin' to fork over that there paper?"

The boys both declared earnestly that there was no such thing in their possession.

"'Tain't in yer pockets, maybe; but ye've hid it somewhere. Tell us where it is, and tell us no lie, or we'll b'ile the truth out o' ye. Come now, let out."

They declared, more earnestly than before, that they had never seen the paper in question, and knew nothing about it.

"Goin' to play stubborn, are ye?" asked the men, in a savage accent. "Ye've got the wrong sort to deal with, youngsters. I reckon we'll make you remember better. Fotch the persuader, boys."

His companions lifted from over the fire the

steaming caldron and placed it on the floor. The boys looked on with a quiver of dread.

"Now see yere, youngsters; we're goin' to treat ye to a b'ilin', 'cept ye own up. Last chance now. Where's that paper?"

"I know nothing of any paper," declared Andy earnestly.

"Take that one, boys," ordered the man. "I bet we make him talk more to the p'int."

Andy's chair, with him on it, was lifted to the brink of the boiling caldron, whose steam filled the air with mist.

"In with his leg, if he don't speak."

One of the men took hold of Andy's leg—the artificial one, as it happened. The boy sat silent, though with a covert smile on his face.

"He's playin' mum. In with it! I bet it'll fotch him to his wite."

In a second more the boy's leg was plunged into the boiling hot water!

The ruffian fixed his eyes sharply upon his face, expecting to hear from him a yell of pain. To his utter surprise, not a sound came from Andy's lips, not a show of feeling marked his face.

A minute passed. Andy sat unmoved, a mocking smile on his lips.

"Well, I'll be fizzled!" cried the man. "What's the boy made of?"

He looked at Andy almost in consternation.

"I'll be stone-jugged if I ever see'd the like. Own up, now, and we'll take it out."

"Got nothin' to own up," averred Andy, quietly. "If you b'ile all the meat off my bones I can't say no more."

"Why don't ye yell, then?"

"What fur? Yellin' won't do no good; so what's the use?"

"Well, I'll be blazed! Take his leg out, boys; ther' ain't no use to b'ile cast iron."

Andy's leg was withdrawn from the water, in which it had lain for full five minutes.

The three men stood looking at him with amazement depicted on their faces. The boy sat as unmoved as if being boiled alive was an everyday affair with him.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" cried the ruffian, with an oath of deep meaning. "Try the other one, pards; they can't be both made of cast-iron. Don't take the leg this time, though. I'm soured on them legs! Put this chap's arm in, and see if he don't squeal."

They lost no time in obeying. Dick, who made no effort to resist, was untied and seated on the floor.

"Hain't you got nothin' to say 'bout that paper, 'fore we b'ile you?" asked the speaker.

"Only that I don't know nothin' about it," answered Dick.

"Stick it in, pards; he's as stubborn as t'other."

Dick's arm was thrust into the hot water to the elbow. But chance brought him the same fortune that it had Andy. It was his artificial arm that was left to boil.

The men stood looking at him in expectation of a scream of agony. Surely this time their victim would squirm and yell for mercy. Not a bit of it; Dick kept as impassive as Andy had done before him. Not a sound came from his lips; not a sign of pain marked his face.

"Well, may I be parboiled!" exclaimed the ruffian. "Something must be out of kelter with that water. It can't be hot. Stick yer hand in, Bill, and try."

One of the men thrust his hand to the wrist into the steaming caldron. In an instant he jerked it out again with a savage execration.

"Hot as blue blazes!" he exclaimed.

The first speaker, not yet satisfied, tried it himself.

"Hot! I should smile!—Take the boy's arm out, Bill. I giv it up, I'll sw'ar I do!"

Dick's arm, also, was then withdrawn from the water. The three men stood looking in a perplexed fashion at their captives, who smiled up with the sweetest innocence into their faces.

"Well, I'll be keel-hauled!" affirmed the leader. "This bangs Bannager. I never seen the like in my born days. What's to be done, pards?"

"Fasten 'em up and leave 'em," said the man called Bill. "We've got to study this thing over, boys. Thar's some sleight-o'-hand 'bout it, sure."

This suggestion seemed acceptable. The prisoners were seized and dragged into an adjoining room. Here were a couple of strong iron chains, fastened to staples let firmly into the floor. At the end they bore manacles like those of a handcuff.

"Fasten one feller's b'iled leg, and t'other one's b'iled arm," ordered the leader. "Maybe

they'll fling up the sponge when they feel cold iron round hot meat."

In a moment more Andy's false leg was seized at the ankle, and Dick's false arm at the wrist, and firmly clasped by the iron manacle.

The men looked at them. They gave no sign of pain.

"Well, I'll be salted down! I'll swear if I ain't clean disbed!" cried the leader. "Come, chaps; they'll wait for us till we come back, anyhow."

The next minute they were gone. The boys were left alone.

CHAPTER IX.

A SCHEME TO WIN A FORTUNE.

MORNING dawned on the Wilson household. Mrs. Wilson was up betimes and had breakfast ready with her usual dispatch. Kate meanwhile was engaged up-stairs at some domestic duty.

"Kate!" called the good lady to her.

"Well!" came the clear answer.

"Won't you stir up them boys? They're mighty lazy this morning. Must have been out too late last night."

"I should think so," said Kate. "They weren't in at bedtime, and I didn't hear them come."

"No more did I," answered her mother. "They've been skylarking somewhere. They've got to give an account of themselves. I won't have no such doings in my house. Call them up. Breakfast's near ready."

The voice of Kate was soon heard, calling in musical accents for Dick and Andy; but no response came. Then she knocked on their door, with increasing loudness, but in vain.

"They are sleeping like logs," she cried.

"Pull the covers off; empty a pitcher of water on them; wake them up somehow," screamed back her mother, in a tone of vexation.

The next sound heard was that of an opening door; then came a repressed cry of surprise and alarm; then Kate's voice again sounded:

"They're not here, mother!"

"Not there? You're dreaming, girl."

"They haven't come home. The bed has not been slept in."

Mrs. Wilson's only response was the clatter of her feet on the carpetless stairs. In a minute more she plunged hastily and breathlessly into the room.

"Not here!" she exclaimed. "Are you sure, Kate? Have you looked—My stars, it's so! the bed's not been touched."

The two women stood looking at each other in alarm. Nothing of the kind had ever happened in that household before. Under Mrs. Wilson's strict rule, her son and her ward had always kept good hours. To be out at bed-time was a rare occurrence with them. To be out all night had never before happened.

"Where can they be?" cried Kate, in a voice of alarm.

"Sorrow if I can tell," answered the old lady.

"I'm sore afraid something's wrong."

"I'm sure something has happened," declared Kate.

As a forlorn hope the house was searched from garret to cellar, but in vain, no trace of the missing boys could be found.

"What to make of it I don't know," exclaimed the old lady. "Could the scapegraces have run away?"

"Run away? What for?"

"What do boys generally run away for?"

"On account of bad treatment; or because they are fools," answered Kate. "Neither of those causes exists here. And see! Here are all their clothes, they have taken nothing!"

"Then something has happened to them!" declared Mrs. Wilson, sinking unnerved into a chair. "Something dreadful, maybe."

"Oh! could Mr. Somers—" began Kate, in a sudden fright.

"They must be looked for, at once!" cried the old lady, springing up with new energy. "The police must be informed. What shall we do, Kate? Oh, my! the breakfast is all burning up, there's nobody but you and me to eat it; and we've got no appetites! Oh, what will become of us all?"

An involuntary smile came to Kate's lips at her mother's medley of cares. She threw her arms around her, and kissed her on the forehead.

"There, don't worry, mother. It will all turn out some frolic after all. You'll see, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go see Mr. Mordaunt. He's been so good to us, and has done so much for the boys; he will know what to do better than we."

"Yes, yes, Kate; that's a good idee. Go right away! Don't lose a minute! But stop; you must eat your breakfast first."

"I can't eat a mouthful," declared Kate.

"You shall take a cup of coffee. You mustn't go without it. And you'd best eat something too. Come, do try, Kate!"

She hustled the alarmed girl down to the table, and literally forced her to make a moderate meal.

In an hour afterward Kate Wilson made her appearance at the house of Mr. Mordaunt. She was in a state of great alarm. Though she had tried to convince her mother that there was nothing in it but a boyish frolic, she had not convinced herself, and her fright grew with every step she took.

She loved one of them as a brother; she loved the other with more than sisterly affection. In spite of her laughter at Andy's boyish love-making, there was a very soft place in her heart for him, and her fear that some disaster had happened to him now made her more than ever aware of this.

"What can be the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Mordaunt, gazing with some alarm at her flushed and frightened face. "What has brought you here so early, and in such haste? Has anything happened?"

"Yes," she gaspingly uttered. "Something dreadful, I am afraid."

She sunk into the chair which he offered her, white with her growing alarm.

"Something dreadful?" he cried. "What is it? Tell me quick! Has anything happened to my—to the boys?"

"I don't know. I am so frightened, Mr. Mordaunt. They have been out all night. They never came home. It never happened before. There has been some accident, or something has been done to them. I came to you. I didn't know what else to do."

"That was right, my child! I can do more than you. Do not be so scared. They may be up to some mischief. There, there! keep cool; tell me all about it."

In hasty accents Kate did so, giving her reasons for fearing that this was more than a boyish frolic.

"That paper that was searched for—Mr. Somers's threats—the verdict—I can't help being frightened."

"I doubt if you have much reason for it," he answered in a tone that helped to reassure her. "There, leave it to me. I will do all that can be done. Go home, now, and keep cool."

"You will have them searched for?"

She looked wistfully into his benevolent face.

"Yes; trust me, and— By the way, I wanted to see you. What is the story of that man who accosted you, and told you that it was in his power to force Mr. Somers to restore Andrew Blake the property he had stolen from his father? The boy gave me a hint of this. It may be of great importance. Tell me the whole story. You do not object to?"

"Not at all, sir, to you; I would not want it generally known. The man insulted me, and I forbade him ever to speak to me again."

"What did he say to that?"

"That he would obey; that the next to speak should be myself."

"He did, eh? There must be something in this. He may be right. Have you seen him since?"

"Yes; but he does not speak to me, nor even look at me. Before, he was always annoying me with his looks."

"I must hear this whole story," said Mr. Mordaunt decisively. "The man that acts that way has a meaning in it. Tell me all you know of him, and the very words he used. I do not ask from curiosity, my child. Much may turn upon this."

Kate, excited by the importance which he gave to an incident which she had dismissed from her thoughts, repeated as well as she could remember the very words the man had used. Mr. Mordaunt listened with grave interest.

"The next to speak should be yourself?" he repeated after her.

"Those were his words, sir."

"He was right. The next to speak must be yourself."

"What do you mean, Mr. Mordaunt?"

"That you must speak to that man, and learn from him what his words mean."

"Oh, sir, I cannot do that!" cried Kate, with a deep blush. "After the way he has spoken to me, and looked at me."

"My dear girl, his looks or his words won't hurt you. I respect your feelings, but there is

too much at stake to let maidenly reserve stand in your way."

"But, mercy, sir, he may be making love to me! That's what he was hinting at."

"Well, that's just what I want him to do! My lass, you'll have to get used to being made love to, if you keep as pretty as you are now.—Now, keep still,"—as Kate half-rose, with a flushed face,—"hear me through. The man has a secret—a precious secret I hope—to sell! We want it—you as well as I; it may be invaluable to us. But, if we want it we must pay its price. This price is not money, but love, or its counterfeit. Kate Wilson, you must speak to this man; you must listen to him; you must let him talk love, if he will, and appear to encourage him; you must wheedle from him that secret.—Do you hear and heed? You must."

"Oh, sir, I cannot!" Her face grew full of rosy alarm.

"It is no easy task, my girl, I know. But, look on it as a first lesson, in what will come easy to you by and by. Have you had no experience already?" He looked into her blushing face with a smile.

"No, no; except—" She hesitated, and grew suddenly silent.

"Except? Then you have had your lesson. I thought so."

"Oh, sir, it was only—only Andy!"

"Only Andy! So; the boy is losing no time either!" Mordaunt laughed pleasantly. "Well, suppose you treat this man as you treated Andy?"

"But I told Andy that he was a foolish boy, and that he should leave all such nonsense till he was old enough to know better."

"He may become old enough to know more. I doubt if he will become old enough to know better," rejoined Mr. Mordaunt, looking meaningly into her face, which was doubly pretty from its rosy hue. "Well, this is a man, and you will have to treat him more mercifully. Do not think I am joking, Miss Wilson," he continued, more gravely. "I am in solid earnest. You must encourage this man to make love, and must demand the price of your concessions. You must, my dear, and—you will."

"I will!" she echoed, in a tone that was faint, but resolute. "It is a hard task you set me, Mr. Mordaunt. I had rather put my hand in the fire. But, if you think—"

"I think it may win Andrew Blake the fortune that has been stolen from him, and bring this rogue of a Somers the punishment he deserves."

"Then I will do it, much as I shrink from the task. I will do it!"

"That is right! There may be nothing in it. There may be much. If it fails, there will be no harm done; you can jilt the fellow again. If it succeeds—"

"I will do it," she repeated. "Now I must go and cheer up mother. Is there anything more, Mr. Mordaunt?"

"Not now. But lose no time about this. You will know how to manage it. I trust to your instincts, and girlish wit and wisdom. And report to me if anything of importance is learned."

"I shall not fail, sir."

In a minute or two afterward Kate was on her way home, with new thoughts in her head and new hope in her heart. The blush still mantled her cheek as she hurried through the street homeward.

Mr. Mordaunt stood at his door, hat in hand, looking after her.

"She will do it," he said. "The girl has vim and wit; she'll do it. And now I must see Clark. I fear there is something of importance behind this disappearance of the boys. Action must be taken at once."

Putting his hat on, he closed the door sharply behind him, and hurried through the streets toward Mr. Clark's office. The affair seemed to him too important to delay for his former secret method of communication with the lawyer.

"What do you think?" he questioned, after he had hastily told Clark of the disappearance of his clients.

"That we had best act at once."

He touched a call-bell on his table. A messenger quickly responded.

"Hurry to Mr. White's office," he ordered. "Tell him to step up here immediately. Business of importance."

The messenger as quickly disappeared.

"Anything more, Mr. Mordaunt?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes; something not just in a legal way, but perhaps with some pith in it. It is a girl's secret; you will keep it?"

"As if it was my own."

Mr. Mordaunt thereupon proceeded to tell

him of the compact he had just made, and of his hopes from it.

"It is a forlorn hope," he said; "but the forlorn hope sometimes wins the battle."

"Well worth trying; quite well worth trying," answered the lawyer, briskly. "We need all the strength we can gain, for I fancy Bryant is going to get his new hearing."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. Nor do I care how soon. We are safe to win."

"Have we the evidence? Aldine is gone; there will be no more bomb explosions; there—"

"Aldine has not gone! I have traced him. I have his full story, and can bring him here at a moment's notice."

"Then let the trial go on! We are safe for the verdict. Now for the boys. Here comes Mr. White."

As he spoke, the detective who had been sent for entered the office.

CHAPTER X.

A LEG AND AN ARM IN FETTERS.

WHERE were the two youthful captives, and what further adventures had fate in store for them? This is what we have next to discover.

Their captors had made a double mistake; first, in seeking to torture their victims by plunging an arm and leg of steel and leather into boiling water, and next by fastening their fetters round this same arm and leg.

John Somers—for it was he that was at the bottom of this base business—in engaging his heartless tool, Martin, had neglected to mention one important particular. He had given the names and residences of his proposed victims, but had overlooked the fact of their lameness, so that Martin and his associates had no suspicion but that it was whole boys with whom they were dealing.

Their surprise and consternation, therefore, were very natural. Here were a pair of young salamanders, to all appearance built like other boys, yet able to bear without flinching a degree of pain that they themselves could not stand for a second.

Andy and Dick had received their artificial limbs just in time to humbug these precious rogues! After their captors had left them to themselves, fettered securely, as they supposed, the boys indulged in some natural mirth.

"My eyes! wasn't that a high old sell!" exclaimed Andy, in delight. "Talk 'bout yer slight-of-handers! why, we're reg'lar salamanders. I was just so bust'ed! full o' laugh, Dick, that I could hardly hold in."

"And I'm sure some o' my ribs must ha' cracked, tryin' to keep it back," averred Dick, giving vent to the laughter he had so long repressed. "They're the wust discounted sundowners as ever wore trowsers."

"Did you twig their faces?" queried Andy. "Couldn't see much on 'em, but all the color seemed skeered out o' their eyes. That little devil turned fairly blue."

"And the other two looked like dried-apples."

The two boys could contain themselves no longer. They burst into a roar of laughter that might have been heard a hundred yards from the house.

Andy was the first to return to a sense of the situation. He choked back his mirth, and pressed his hand firmly over his comrade's mouth.

"Shet up, Dick," he warned. "Them coons mayn't be far off. We're makin' noise enough to raise a catamount. We're not out o' the woods yet, pard."

"Ain't we! What's to hinder, I'd like to know?" asked Dick. "They've got their iron round my game arm and your game leg, and all we've got to do is to unbuckle and slip out."

He suited the action to the word, pulling back his sleeve as he spoke, and loosening the buckles and straps that linked his false to what was left of his true arm.

"That's 'bout the gayest part of the puz," affirmed Andy, with a chuckle of delight. "Far 'em to come and chain us by these game go-ers! It jist beats Bannager, as that wrinkled little bloodhound said."

As he spoke, he was following Dick's example, by unbuckling and throwing off his leg. In a minute more the late captives stood free—except for those parts of their bodies that had been bought and paid for; these remained in fetters.

Their next effort was to release their artificial limbs from the manacles that held them. But this proved not so easy a job. The strong, steel clasps had been locked tightly round wrist and

ankle, and could not be moved. Nor could the foot and hand be slipped through them.

The cripples, after several minutes of busy effort, stopped and looked down in despair. It seemed impossible to get the fetters off without breaking the limbs, and this they had no fancy for doing. They would be useless if broken. Some other means of releasing them must be found.

"Take a peep round, Dick," advised Andy. "See if you can find a hammer and chisel. Ain't no use foolin' with this lock; it's got to be cut open."

Dick, proud in the possession of his two legs, obeyed this suggestion, searching diligently through the room in which they were, and the adjoining kitchen, in a vain effort to find the desired tools.

"Ain't none there, Andy," he announced. "Can't find nothin' but a poker and a tongs, and them won't be of no use."

"It's thunderation awkward," declared Andy. "We oughter be off, makin' two-forty tracks away from this ugly hole; but I hate like p'isen to do it. Legs and arms like them ain't to be dug out ash-barrels or found in rubbish-heaps, and I can't fotch myself to leave mine fur these snaky coons."

"Nor me neither," answered Dick.

"They're skeered bad, or they'd been back afore now," resumed Andy. "Let's make a round of the shanty. We mought find somethin' somewhere that'll bust them there ugly bracelets."

No sooner said than done. Andy was not in very good shape for walking, with one leg only, and not even a crutch to take the place of the other. But this difficulty was overcome, Dick serving him as leg and crutch in one.

Throwing his arm, on the lame side, firmly round Dick's shoulders, and supporting himself in this way, the pair of cripples walked off on three legs. They looked like a dime museum freak, with three arms and legs, and two bodies and heads.

Thus equipped for the journey of life, they made their way through the house, leaving the fettered leg and arm behind them.

This leg and arm presented a strange and startling appearance. An effort had been made to hide the bare fact of their leather, rubber, and metal anatomy by inclosing them in a strong covering of sheepskin which had been stained of a very natural flesh color.

To all appearance it was a real leg and arm that lay there in the embrace of the fetters, their shape and color alike being those of natural human limbs. So much like this did they seem, that it would have needed a close examination to prove the cheat.

As for the owners of these discarded bits of machinery, they searched the house through, up-stairs and down-stairs alike, in the effort to find some tools with which to force the steel clasps from their limbs.

It was a wearisome search, particularly for Andy, and they in the end stopped to rest on a bed in one of the up-stairs rooms.

"We'd been smarter to have dug out o' doors in the start," remarked Dick, "an' fatched somebody here to help us out of the snarl."

"Reckon you're 'bout seven-eighths right," admitted Andy. "We're like two bits o' cheese in a rat-hole, and if we don't look out we'll be nipped. It takes more than two boys to make one Solomon. Let's git out o' this shanty. I got to rest a bit, though, 'cause this leg o' mine is about used up all the go that's in it."

Being both of the same opinion, they lay back on the bed, drawing the coverings up over them, for the air was a little chilly. As they lay, they entered into a chat on the situation. But their chat became, minute by minute, more and more broken and disconnected, and before many minutes subsided into silence. They were both asleep.

The bit of candle which they had found, and which had aided them in their search of the house, continued to burn for an hour afterward. But at the end of that time all its tallow was exhausted, and only a fragment of greasy wick remained. This continued to blaze for several minutes; then the blaze subsided to a dull spark; then this vanished, and utter darkness remained.

For hours the boys lay there in the oblivion of slumber.

Hour after hour passed over that lonely house, and all within lay in unbroken silence. Morning was not far away, though without and within all continued in the densest darkness, when the ruffians returned.

Confident that their captives were safely in their hands, and that, even if they should shout

with the full power of their lungs, no help would come to them in that lonely situation, they had spent the night in the completion of some other of their criminal designs, and returned only when the darkness was nearly at its end.

Striking a light, they entered the kitchen together.

"The'r' blazin' quiet, in there," said Martin, the leader, with a jerk of his thumb toward the inner room. "Wonder if they're snoozin'. A feller'd think they couldn't, arter the b'lin' they got."

"I wouldn't like to say them there boys couldn't do anything," growled the man called Bill. "They could go to sleep on a volcano, or take a snooze in a limekiln; that's my notion."

"Well, I s'pose we kin soon find out what they're up to," affirmed Martin. "There's no blamed use standin' listenin' when a feller's only got to look."

Lamp in hand, he threw open the door of the room where the boys had been left, and looked within.

A yell of terror came from his lips, as he retreated with such haste as to nearly fall over Bill, who was advancing behind him.

"What the blazes ails—" began this individual. His words ended in a loud cry, as he caught sight of the objects within. A retreat as hasty as that of Martin's followed.

"Hello!" cried the third. "What's up?"

"Shoot me fur a pigeon," exclaimed Bill, "if them boys ain't slid off, and left ther leg and arm behind 'em. It's jist ther rummest go as ever I clapped eyes on."

"Ther b'iled leg and arm?"

"Yes. They must ha' chopped 'em off. I jedge 'bout all the life was b'iled outter them, and so they've dropped 'em and hopped off minus."

The third ruffian, thinking that his comrades must have been scared out of their wits by some trick of the captives, advanced to look himself, snatching the lamp from Martin's hand and holding it well before him.

The same frightful objects met his eyes that had so startled his companions. The boys were gone, but there on the floor lay what seemed an arm of flesh and blood, still in the clasp of the fetters. And leaning against a chair close by stood what seemed the lower half of a human leg. To all appearance it had been cut off and left behind.

The third ruffian slammed the door shut with a shudder of terror, and looked into the white faces of his comrades. Three such badly scared individuals had never stood in that house before.

"There's somethin' blazin' queer 'bout this," declared Bill, with an oath.

"It's uncanny, that's what it is," added Martin. "I've seen enough o' them things in there—by night, anyhow. I don't want no more o' that 'cept in broad daylight."

"Let's git," suggested Bill.

"I dunno. Maybe them boys is somewhere 'bout the shanty."

"Them boys! It's my notion they've gone off through a key-hole, like one of the old-time magicians. They're not boys; they're imps."

"Through the back door, more likely. We found it open, you know," suggested the third ruffian.

"What's back o' all this, anyhow?" queried Bill. "What's the boys did? You ain't told us that. And who's the man that's findin' the spoolin' fur this here job?"

They had left the kitchen as he spoke, and advanced through the entry toward the front door.

"Can't let that cat out the bag," rejoined Martin, cautiously. "You've got yer plunder, and that's all all you want in fur."

"But ther's somethin' so durned cur'us 'bout it all that you mought let us in. 'Tain't often I want to know."

"I won't tell the man's name," answered Martin; "but ther's a bit o' funny bizness back o' it all as I don't mind chattin' 'bout a bit. The chap as 'gaged us is a wuss one nor we is, boys, that's my 'pinion. He's a thief and a murderer, 'cause he robbed a man of his patent and druv him to jump in the river and git drowned. Ther' was a paper drawn up. This drowned man's name was on it, and my name's on it fur witness. But I never see'd him sign it. The whole thing was a fake."

"The deuce!" cried Bill. "And he got rich that way?"

"Rich as a Jew!"

"And ye're takin' jobs like this, when you mought be squeezin' him!" exclaimed Bill, with a sniff of contempt.

"Hain't no baby, to play the skeer-'em dodge

on," answered Martin. "I've squeezed him some; but if I pushed him too hard, I'd git a knife in my jugular. I know his sort."

"And what's these boys got ter do with it?"

"It's my notion as one of 'em is the son of the drowned man, and that the old thief's got scared o' him. Maybe he's nabbed the paper I signed? It's a mighty 'portant one, I know. Let's peg out, pard. I'm 'feared o' this house till arter daylight. We kin come back then, and 'vestigate."

This advice hit with the opinion of others, and in a minute more they had all left the house.

Hardly had they done so, when the two boys came down the stairs, Andy leaning on Dick's shoulder, and bearing a hammer and chisel in his hand. They had awakened, and been fortunate enough to find the tools they had before sought in vain.

"That coon's let a mighty sizable cat out o' his bag," said Andy. "I want to hole him bad. Peg arter 'em, Dick, on your two travelers and see where that thin-faced chap goes. He's let out as how he is a false witness to that document, and 'twon't do to let him guv us the go-by. Arter 'em, mighty sly, but don't miss 'em. While you're gone I'll see if I can't chop off them iron bracelets."

Dick lost no time in obeying this suggestion, while Andy crawled on his hands and knees to the room where their lost limbs had been left.

Soon the loud ring of steel on steel resounded through that lonely mansion.

It was ten o'clock the next day when the three ruffians returned, and threw open the door of the room, still not without a sense of dread.

To their utter surprise the frightful objects of the night before had vanished. On the floor lay the fetters, with an iron link of each chopped through. The limbs had gone; and with them the steel clasps that bound them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FISH OUT OF THE NET.

AT about the same hour that their late tormentors were discovering the disappearance of the fettered leg and arm, Mr. Mordaunt was surprised by the advent of his youthful protégés, who walked into his room with all their old life and spirit.

Andy was again mounted on his two legs, and seemed doubly proud in their possession after his temporary loss. Dick swung his regained arm with an air as if it were a true part of himself.

Mr. Mordaunt looked up at them with eyes of inquiry. He saw in their looks that there was some mystery to be divulged.

"Where in the world have you been?" he asked. "Mrs. Wilson and her daughter are scared to death about you, and I have had detectives put in search of a pair of lost boys. What foolish skylarking have you been up to?"

"Not quite so foolish," answered Andy, lifting his trousers-leg and showing the steel clasp still round his ankle. "That ain't much like skylarkin', I guess."

"Nor this ain't neither," chimed in Dick, pulling back his sleeve and showing his wrist, round which the circlet of steel was seen, with a link of the chain still depending from it.

"Why, what in the world does this mean?" asked Mr. Mordaunt, starting up.

"It means that we've been through the rough old job you ever see'd, and that we've played the dumbest slick game on a set of bladders reveals you ever heard of."

"That's jist 'bout the size of it," added Dick. "If you want to see a lot of skinned rodents, you ought to hunt up them fellers as we had out fur with last night."

"You young reprobates, you've been up to some deviltry, that's sure," asserted Mr. Mordaunt, sinking back into his chair. "Come, out with it; let me hear your story!"

"The deviltry's on t'other side," answered Andy; "but I reckon the joke's on ourn. Jist wait, and I'll tell you all about it."

This he did, very much to Mr. Mordaunt's amusement.

"The heartless wretches!" he exclaimed, on hearing of their act in plunging the narrator's leg into the boiling caldron.

But he heard with bursts of laughter the story of how they had tried to scald a pair of artificial limbs.

"The man who set them on you could have told but half his story," he remarked. "They were ignorant of your lameness."

"Lucky fur us they was," said Andy.

He proceeded to relate how they had escaped and left their limbs behind them, and their search for tools to release these valuable parts of their anatomy.

The narrative ended in Andy's describing their hours of sleep, their being awakened by hearing steps and voices down-stairs, and the fright of the ruffians on seeing the fettered arm and leg. The boys had been near enough to hear their cries of terror, and to make out enough of their words to guess what had scared them.

Andy went on to tell what else they had overheard—the revelation that one of the villains had served Somers as a false witness. To this part of the story Mr. Mordaunt listened with the most intense interest.

"By all that's good!" he exclaimed, "that news is worth its weight in gold. Who is this fellow? I must know. If he can be made to tell the truth before a jury we have John Somers where we want him!"

"That's what I thought," replied Andy. "So I put Dick on his track, while I chopped our arm and leg loose. Dick can tell you what he done."

"I hoied him," answered Dick, with an air of satisfaction. "I tracked him to a caboose down in Jones street. It's a low-down place, and I reckon it's where he lives."

"Very good! very good!" assented Mr. Mordaunt, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "You have done a glorious night's work."

"For me, maybe," rejoined Andy; "for if dad is drowned, I'm his heir. But, I dunno what makes you take so much interest in it, Mr. Mordaunt."

"John Somers once did me a great wrong; I want to even with him," he answered. "And I will! I begin to see my way clear."

"I hope to gracious you will," affirmed Andy. "Cause when you're even, I reckon I'll be a long ways ahead."

"Now what have you in view?"

"To go home," answered the boys.

"No, no. That won't be safe. These wretches will learn their error, and try their dangerous work over again. You must stay here in hiding. I will have the detective taken off your track, and send word to Mrs. Wilson that you are safe."

"I don't like playin' fox in the hole," rejoined Andy. "I ain't afraid of them fellers. Dick and me won't go mosing round arter dark ag'in."

"Your house stands alone. These desperate wretches may seize you there. And the next time you will not get off so easily. You must stay here—at least till I can look up some one to put on guard in your house. I will attend to these matters at once. Don't stir till my return!"

He took his hat and left the house, bidding the boys to amuse themselves during his absence, but on no account to set foot out of doors.

On his way to Mr. Clark's office he passed a man whose face attracted his attention. He was a small-framed, wiry-looking fellow, with sandy hair, and a foxy expression in his eyes, round which the skin of his face was much wrinkled. He was dressed in the garb of a workingman, but there was something slouching in his gait.

"He looks like the fellow whom Andy described," said Mr. Mordaunt to himself. "But, that's not all of it. I've seen the man before—years ago! Can I recall him? He is one of the gang that was around Somers in the old days."

He walked on, deeply thinking. The man he had observed made his way in an opposite direction, continuing his course till he reached the Somers Agricultural Works.

Here he handed a soiled-looking letter to a clerk, asking him to take it to Mr. Somers at once, as it was important.

The clerk looked at the letter, and then at the bearer.

"Who is this from?" he asked. "Mr. Somers don't like to be disturbed."

"Tell him it's from Mr. Martin. I calkerlate he'll take it in."

Without further objection the clerk entered the inner office, and delivered the letter, with the message.

"What?" cried Mr. Somers quickly; "who brings this?"

"He looks like a workman, sir."

"Hold on a minute. There may be an answer."

He tore open the envelope and read the brief note it contained, with an impassive countenance.

"Yes; I thought so. There is an answer. Tell the chap to step in here. I will send it back by word of mouth."

The clerk did as ordered. The messenger entered the office, closing the door carefully behind him. Mr. Somers was engaged in tearing the letter into fragments. There was anything but a satisfied look on his face.

"What brings you here?" he asked, in a savage tone. "You might be recognized. So you've bungled the job, it seems."

"Somebody has," answered the man, surlily. "I ain't sure who."

"I'm pretty sure. You had them in your hands and let them escape you. How?"

"How?" exclaimed Martin, for it was he. "By the seven sins, John Somers, the next time you put me on any job, let it be on some ordinary human, not on a magician, that can unship his legs and arms, and slip off his head, without a grin! I've had enough o' that sort."

"What do you mean?" asked Somers, in a tone of mingled surprise and indignation.

"Mean! I'll tell you what I mean."

Martin, helping himself to a chair and throwing his hat on the floor beside him, proceeded to relate the events of the night before.

He had not gone far, however, before Mr. Somers called out angrily:

"What is all this nonsense? Did you try to bring him to terms by soaking his wooden leg in hot water?"

"Wooden leg? Ther' weren't no wooden leg."

"Yes, there was!"

"I tell you there weren't. The chap had both his trotters."

"His leg must have grown then, for a month ago he stumped in here on a piece of solid hickory."

The two men looked at one another. A new idea was beginning to make its way through Martin's brain.

"Wooden leg?" he repeated. "It must have been one of them patent artificial ones. And t'other boy must have had an arm of the same sort. I begin to see through the blamed jigger now."

"Of course. One has only one leg, and the other only one arm. I told you that."

"Hold up thar!" exclaimed Martin, angrily. "You never said a word of the sort. You didn't guv a hint o' arms and legs. All you told was ther' names and whar they lived, and left us to guess the balance."

"And a pretty job you made of it."

"Jist as pretty a job as you laid out fur us," retorted Martin.

"Well, you know the dodge now. You can finish your job."

"Much I can! They've guv us leg and arm bail with a vengeance. Jist keep quiet and listen while I tell you what a party of cheap sold jackasses we've been."

Mr. Somers obeyed, not speaking a word while his villainous agent told the remainder of his story.

"And three sich scared coons never wore shoe-leather afore," he concluded.

Mr. Somers sat back in his chair and looked at him with a helpless expression. The case seemed one beyond words. He could only show his feelings in his looks. When he spoke again, it was in a very mild tone.

"You have failed," he said. "I should have told you they were cripples, no doubt. It is the worst sell I ever heard of. No matter; it must be done over again! And the next time, pinch them, to see if it's iron or flesh and blood you're dealing with."

"Pinch 'em! I'll take a piece out," declared Martin, savagely. "You bet high they don't git no sich sell on me again."

CHAPTER XII.

A PLOTTER OUT-PLOTTED.

"ALL is right, mother. The boys are safe. Here is a note from Mr. Mordaunt telling us so. We need not worry any more, he says."

These words were spoken by Kate Wilson, who called in glad tones to her mother upstairs.

In a minute more the clatter of Mrs. Wilson's feet were heard on the stairs, hastily descending.

"You don't say so, Kate!" she cried in equal gladness. "Where is he? Is he gone?"

"Yes; he left the note, and went without saying anything."

"Safe! That's good news. But where are they? What have they been at? Some rascality, I know. If I get hold of that Dick—" Her wrath began to rise, the moment she found there was no cause for alarm.

"No, no, mother; they have been in some danger; Mr. Mordaunt doesn't say what. They

are not to come home just yet, he says. It may not be safe."

"Not safe? Does he say that, Kate?"

"Yes."

"Whatever can it be? My poor boys!—But he says they're all right now! You're sure of that?"

"Here is his note, mother, read it for yourself."

"My, my!" exclaimed the old woman, after reading the brief missive. "Why couldn't he tell us more! That's just like a man. He might have known we wanted to hear all. I do wish you'd go see him, Kate. I'm so anxious to know if they're really safe."

"He might not like it," answered Kate. "I think I'd better not go."

"Well, well, I— But I must go back to my work." And with a sudden change of thought, Mrs. Wilson clattered briskly up-stairs again, leaving Kate alone with her thoughts.

She stood musing by the kitchen-door for a few minutes, and then put on her hat and stepped out into the garden. Here the bees were humming busily among the flowers. Kate stooped over them and went to work, making her way slowly onward until she reached the corner of the inclosure adjoining the street.

Here she stood awhile looking over the fence. The street appeared deserted, or nearly so, a single human form being visible in the distance.

Here eyes fixed themselves on this form. There was something familiar in it. She watched the approaching figure curiously.

"It is he," she remarked, at length. "I thought I knew him! Shall I do as Mr. Mordaunt said? I hate to. And yet—it may be very important."

The man was rapidly coming nearer. It was undoubtedly the man who had accosted her at the time of the bomb explosion.

Kate's impulse was to retreat. She had to force herself to remain. In a minute or two more he was close at hand. As he came near his eyes, which had been fixed on the graceful form in the fence corner, were turned away and looked steadily down the street. He seemed bent on keeping his part of the compact.

Kate hesitated, with the words upon her lips. It was hard for her to speak, though she had promised Mr. Mordaunt to do so. The man came opposite her. His face was grave. Had there been a look of knowing consciousness upon it, she could not have spoken. But its serious expression gave her courage.

He was already several steps past, when she faltered out, in low tones:

"Sir."

He stopped instantly, and turned.

"You told me—" she began, and stopped hesitatingly.

"That you should be the next to speak," he said with a meaning look.

"No, no; but that you had it in your power to restore Andrew Blake the rights and fortune which had been stolen from him."

"I have!" he answered briefly.

"In what way?" she asked. "What can you do?"

"Not so fast, Miss Wilson. I can do all I have said. But, what I can do has a price. It is to be sold, not given!"

He had approached the fence, and stood now beside it, only a few feet away.

"I have no money, sir."

"I want no money. It is not for that I have sought your acquaintance and favor, Miss Wilson. I love you. There is no crime in that, I hope. I could not help it. It came to me at sight of your face."

Kate colored to the temples, and took an involuntary step backward. She had to force the next words from her lips.

"You would buy my love?"

"No; love is not a thing for sale. I know that. But, you might look on me less coldly; you might admit me into the circle of your acquaintance; you might give me a friend's opportunity to entreat your favor."

She looked at him, still with reddened face. The man was not ill-looking. Nor was his regards obtrusive. He seemed modestly awaiting her decision.

"I do not even know your name," she muttered.

"My name is Joseph Corson. I am a respectable man, Miss Wilson, and feel for you only the highest respect and esteem. If I might be permitted—"

"What is your boasted power over John Somers?" she interrupted.

"I hold a paper which—"

"What! that paper? The paper he lost the

day of the explosion, and which he accused me of taking?"

"The same!" he answered.

"But, how did you get it?"

"It was blown out of the open window, and almost into my hands. Fortunately, I knew its value. John Somers will not get it back again easily. That paper is for sale only to the highest bidder."

"The highest bidder!"

"You can make the highest bid in the world to me, Miss Wilson; a higher bid than all John Somers's money."

Kate's face flushed deeply again. The man's words were respectful; his tone was full of ardor.

"Where is that paper?" she asked.

"I have it with me. It never leaves my possession. That mortgage assignment once destroyed, John Somers ceases to be a millionaire, and Andrew Blake steps into his place."

Kate stood in musing silence. What to say or do she knew not. It seemed to her that she had already gone beyond the bounds of maidenly modesty. Should she go on?

The stake was a great one. As for the man before her, she detested him; but there was no reason to show that. If she could obtain that paper!

"Sir," she began, "I do not like this. But—"

"I can do you still more good," he interrupted. "I can win that damage suit for your brother. I know enough to crush John Somers."

"Do that, sir, and I will hold you one of my friends. As for the paper—"

"You know its price," he said, significantly.

"No more, sir—at present. We may—meet later." She turned and walked away, leaving her stranger suitor with a look of crafty triumph upon his face.

It was evident that his seeming humility and modesty were assumed, and that he felt that he had taken a long step forward toward the purpose that inspired him.

Yet Mr. Joseph Corson was destined to learn the truth of the old adage, that, "there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

Had he looked behind him as he walked away, he might have seen a crouching form rise into view from behind the corner of the garden fence, and look after him with meaning eyes.

It was the form of Martin, the crafty agent of John Somers! On leaving the office of the latter, with the understanding that the boys must be seized again, and this time not suffered to escape until the stolen document was gained, Martin had made his way toward the Wilson cottage, on a reconnoitering expedition.

Seeing the form of Kate Wilson in the garden, he had stealthily approached, and crouched down behind the corner of the fence adjoining the roadway, in hopes of seeing or hearing something that would aid him in his villainous project.

He had struck a fortunate interval for his purposes. He overheard the whole interview between the young lady and her would-be lover, and when he rose to his feet it was with a new project in his mind.

"May I be keel-hauled, if I ain't struck ile!" he ejaculated. "To think o' my hittin' it so 'mazing slick! That there sunny coon's got the paper we're tryin' to squeeze them boys fur. He's got it in his pocket, he says. He's kind 'nough to carry it 'bout with him, so's to save trouble to gents like me. I'll bet a cow 'gainst a Varginny persimmon he don't have it much longer. That there doc's my plunder."

He put himself on the track of the man in advance, following him in a stealthy fashion that was the result of long experience. There was no difficulty in this. Corson did not dream of pursuit, and never once looked round.

He was so wrapt in dreams of his own projects that he failed to hear the steps of his pursuer when they came near him. Their route had taken them from the built-up portion of the city, and they were now in a deserted part of the roadway.

A smile of triumph curled Corson's lips, the outward signal of pleasant thoughts within him.

"She's mine!" he said aloud. "I've taken the first step; I can see my way to the last. I'll play my fish with that patent assignment so neatly that she shall give me her hand before she gets the paper."

His soliloquy was brought to a sudden end by a hard blow that fell on the side of his head, and hurled him like a log to the earth.

He lay there insensible, while his assailant hastily searched his pockets. After a couple of minutes Martin rose in triumph, with the folded parchment in his hand!

"I bet yer don't win the gal with that paper, hoss," he declared. "I calkerlate I know where I kin put that paper to more advantage."

An hour afterward Martin again appeared at the Somers Agricultural Works, and accosted the same clerk with whom he had spoken before.

"S'pose ye tell Mr. Somers as the gent as was here afore has delivered his message, and here's the answer," he said, offering a closed envelope. "You kin tell him that ther person's a-waitin'."

His former experience with this individual induced the clerk to treat him with more respect than before, and in a few minutes Martin was ushered into the presence of the mill magnate.

"Well?" said the latter, looking up at him with a glance of inquiry.

"Yer don't happen to have that thousand lay-in' round loose in yer pockets?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Kaze as soon as you shell it out I'm on hand to shell out that there docyment. I've got thar this time, Mr. Somers, and no mistake!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECOND VERDICT.

"You bet your everlastin' davy we're on the home run this time!" declared Andy Blake to his comrade Dick.

It was a week after the events of the last chapter, and the two boys were walking along without any pretense of hiding from their enemies, or any show that they were not whole and sound. They had grown so used to their new limbs that no one would have guessed that Andy's leg and Dick's arm had not grown on them by process of nature.

"Mr. Clark says so, anyhow, and I guess he knows," answered Dick.

"What he don't know about the law ain't wuth knowin', that's my notion," asserted Andy.

"And what old Somers won't know 'bout it when we git through with him you could pick up with a pin," chimed in Dick.

The boys were on their way to the courtroom, whither they had been summoned as witnesses in the new trial which had been granted in the great damage suit.

Bryant, the legal adviser of John Somers, had succeeded in his efforts to have the case brought up again on appeal, claiming that the jury on the other trial had been unduly influenced by the results of the dynamite explosion.

He had been unsuccessful in his efforts to discover who Mr. Mordaunt was. All he could learn was that this gentleman was a stranger to the city, where he had appeared only a few days before the opening of the damage suit.

But, who he really was, whence he had come, or what was his secret purpose in backing those boys, the lawyer failed to learn. In all these particulars he remained completely in the dark.

All this troubled him very little. He felt sure in his own mind that this time his client would win, and that was all he cared for just then.

Aldine, the dangerous witness, had disappeared, and no trace of his whereabouts could be found. Bryant did not care where he was, so that he was safely out of the way. All the other witnesses were sound on the Somers side, and he felt sure that no important testimony in rebuttal could be brought. He counted strongly on proving that the boys had been crippled through their own carelessness, and had no claim for damages.

Mr. Bryant was destined to something of a disappointment. He had not counted sufficiently on the resources of his opponent, Clark, nor on the chapter of legal chances. He was therefore more than surprised when, after examining the boys themselves, the next witness called on the side of the prosecution was "William Aldine."

Somers, who was in court, started with a feeling akin to consternation on hearing this, and on seeing his discharged workman walk up to the witness-stand!

At Bryant's request he had made strong efforts to find him, and, failing in this, had concluded that he was fairly out of the way.

It now appeared that the prosecution had kept him in hiding, to spring his evidence upon the jury at a critical period in the case.

Aldine's evidence, in fact, was now more strongly in favor of the plaintiffs than at the former trial. He now swore positively that he had seen the boys tighten up the bolts of the shifter, which had a habit of working loose when not looked after. He also gave evidence as to the results of the dynamite explosion in the factory, which had shaken down three more of these shifters.

But, Clark reserved his strongest piece of testimony to the last.

Joseph Corson was called, and put upon the stand.

This man, furious at being robbed of his precious prize, which he felt sure had been done by agents of Somers, had called on Clark and told him a story which filled his legal soul with joy.

This story he now repeated to the court. It was to the effect that, on the evening before the accident to the boys, he had been passing the Agricultural Works, and, seeing a light inside, had stopp'd and looked in at one of the windows.

He had seen John Somers, candle in hand, working with a wrench on the shifter of the boys' machine. Just what he was doing he could not be sure, but he was positive that he was moving the wrench to the left, as if loosening a bolt.

This evidence came like a thunderbolt upon the court. Somers grew deathly pale. His lawyer looked at him in surprise and dismay. He put Corson through a severe cross-examination, but he had best have left him alone, for when he was done the case was stronger for the plaintiffs than ever.

"Why did you not give this evidence at the former trial?" asked Mr. Bryant sharply. "Or perhaps it was not invented until that trial was over?"

"I did not know its value till I read the reports of that trial," answered the witness coolly.

"I had not connected Mr. Somers's action with the accident, before then."

"Aha! you have a special reason for making that difficult connection now?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your reason?"

"That justice may be done to these crippled boys."

Mr. Bryant dropped the cross-examination. It was evident that nothing was to be made of this witness. In fact, it looked as if nothing was to be made of the case. The whisper went through the court that John Somers ought to be arrested as a criminal.

Mr. Bryant struggled hard to overcome the effect of this damaging testimony. He got all he possibly could out of his own witnesses, but it was all very negative when compared with the positive evidence before the court. He did his best also, in his summing up of the case, to disparage the witnesses of the prosecution.

Mr. Clark, on his side, had little to say. A few strong words covered his address to the jury.

"My case speaks for itself," he said; "there is no need for me to dilute it with words. We came here, gentlemen of the jury, to deal with an accident. It looks now as if we were dealing with a crime. My clients, with careful caution, tighten up that dangerous machinery. Their employer, for a purpose of his own, loosens it. It falls, and while not killing them, as perhaps intended, it maims them for life. Why was this done? What was to be gained by their death? I shall not say; I imagine every one here knows."

We shall give no more of his address, nor of the further proceedings of the case. It will suffice to say that it was given to the jury at ten minutes past three, and that they returned into the court with their verdict at half-past three.

"Have you agreed upon your verdict, gentlemen of the jury?"

"We have," answered the foreman.

"State your verdict to the court."

"We affirm the decision of the former court, your Honor, assessing damages on John Somers in the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars in favor of both the injured workmen."

An exclamation of satisfaction rose from the spectators, whose sympathies had been strongly enlisted in favor of the crippled boys.

As for them, they were wild with joy.

"I knowed it, Dick," exclaimed Andy. "I knowed Mr. Clark would squeeze him. My stars, ain't we got him where the hair's short?"

"You bet your everlastin' on it," answered Dick. "And ain't it a jolly pile they've giv us, Andy."

"Tain't nothin' to what's in the wind," said Andy. "Jist wait till that patent suit comes up; then you'll see things a-billin'. This is only the first turn of the screw. Wait till we get the whole weight on!"

"Come, boys," said Mr. Mordaunt, who had been present in court. "You have won a second time. Somers will have to pay up now. He has exhausted his powers of appeal."

They followed him from the court. The late spectators were collected in groups outside and busily talking over the results of the trial.

It was easy to tell the general feeling. It was strongly against John Somers, and went so far as to accuse him of an attempt at murder.

"He is afraid of that boy," exclaimed one strong-speaking individual. "And well he may be, for the rascal drove the lad's father to suicide. There was something crooked about that business, and if John Somers wants to get rid of that boy, he knows why."

"That's my notion, too," asserted a second speaker. "He didn't come by his million by square means, and if young Blake is wide awake he'll bring suit for more than damages."

"On that patent right, do you mean?"

"Yes; I've heard Blake himself swear he never signed that paper. He brought the thing into court, too, but didn't make anything out of it."

"If he didn't then, his son can't now. John Somers ain't the sort that leave loop-holes open."

"That's true. But, sometimes wood splits by long standing, and lets daylight through. And the same thing might happen in a law-suit."

"If daylight ever shines through this case, it will show a rogue at the bottom of it, and that rogue's name is John Somers," affirmed the other speaker.

Mr. Mordaunt with his young followers, had paused to listen to this chat. He now walked on.

"You see how public feeling stands," he remarked.

"There's daylight through that, sure enough," answered Andy.

"Suit on that patent must be brought, and at once," declared Mr. Mordaunt. "John Somers shall be made to show that he holds this business by a just claim, or shall return it to its rightful owner."

"Which is me," added Andy. "'Cause I'm my father's heir."

A significant smile came upon Mr. Mordaunt's face. It was evident that there was more in his mind than appeared on the surface.

This stranger certainly must have some secret purpose of his own behind his conduct!

CHAPTER XIV.

PAID IN HIS OWN COIN.

"HERE is your man."

It was in the office of Phineas Clark, lawyer, these words were spoken. The speaker was an officer in the public service; the man spoken of the villainous character whom we have already met under the name of Martin.

There were several other persons present in the office, including Mr. Mordaunt and the two boys.

The lawyer lifted his eyes and fixed them keenly on the uneasy fellow who stood before him.

"Is this the man?" he asked, turning to Andy.

"I can swear to half his face," answered Andy. "T'other half was hid. But them eyes belong to one man's face; and that's his carrotty hair, too. That's the chap sure's beans is beans."

"So, my friend," said the lawyer, "you have a way of catching stray boys, and amusing yourself by sticking their legs and arms in boiling water? A very pretty game, no doubt; but the law calls it another name."

"What sort o' boozin' nonsense is this ye'r' puttin' through yer?" growled Martin. "S'pose ye jist 'splain yerself, mister."

"Look at that leg, old chap," broke in Andy, thrusting his artificial limb under Martin's nose. "Feel it, and see if the meat's b'iled off."

Martin looked at him savagely for a moment. Then a look of deep curiosity came into his eyes. He could not resist the temptation to satisfy himself about the make-up of that magical leg. He grasped it by a movement that seemed involuntary.

"Well, I'll be gammoned!" he ejaculated. "Dern my eyes, if it ain't made up of iron-railin'."

A laugh went through the office at his tone of disgust and surprise.

"You've given yourself away, friend Martin," remarked the lawyer; "and before witnesses. You may as well own up. I don't mean you any harm. I'm not going to prosecute that case, if you'll only tell the truth in another."

Martin looked at him with a cunning expression in his eyes.

"What other?" he asked.

"About fifteen years ago you witnessed a paper drawn by John Somers, and purporting to be drawn by Andrew Blake. It was Blake's

signature you were supposed to witness. Did you see him make it?"

"I—that is—yes, by thunder, I did!"

"Don't lie, Martin, 'cause it won't pay!" warned Andy. "I heerd you say you didn't. Dick, here, heerd the same. Likewise them two jail-birds, your pards. Ain't no use in your jumpin' the fence, 'cause we're layin' low on t'other side."

Martin gazed at the speaker like a fox who feels himself in a trap.

"Dick and I were there, when you chaps were takin' a peep at the pieces we left behind us," continued Andy. "We heerd every word you said. Then we spliced up and made tracks."

Martin continued to gaze at him, while the explanation of the mystery seemed to filter slowly into his brain.

"You may as well turn state's-evidence, Martin," resumed the lawyer. "We'll make it worth your while. We are going to knock the props from under John Somers. You'll find there is more money on our side in this game than on his."

"'Bout signin' that paper," began Martin, slowly. "It's my notion as Blake—"

"And we've got the other witness," interrupted the lawyer, sharply. "He owns the corn, and you had best do the same, if you'd keep out of trouble."

"It's my notion as Blake wasn't thar, jist 'bout then," concluded Martin.

"I don't believe he was," remarked Mr. Mordaunt, now first speaking. "And I have some reason to know. The day you make that statement before a jury, my man, you will be a thousand dollars the richer."

"And we'll drop that little fun 'bout the b'iled leg," supplemented Andy.

"I calkerlate somehow you had the best of the fun 'bout that b'iled leg," remarked Martin, a slow smile curling his lips. "It were an out-an'-outer of a sell.—A thousand down, and a thousand arter—their's my terms," he continued, turning to Mr. Mordaunt.

"Truth is an expensive commodity in these parts," answered that gentleman. "But truth just now is a precious jewel, and we'll have to pay its price. It is a bargain!"

"Then I'm yer man! I reckon I owe John Somers a dig, anyhow, and it's 'bout time to give it. Ye kin count on me."

A look of satisfaction passed between the persons present. But Phineas Clark was too keen a lawyer to take any risks. It would not do to let Martin change his mind. A notary was sent for, and his affidavit as to the witnessing of the paper was taken on the spot. He swore plainly that he had not seen Blake sign his name, and that John Somers had paid him a ten-dollar bill for his signature.

When he left that room it was with a thousand dollars in his pocket, and the pledge of another thousand after the trial. Mr. Clark turned with a gratified air to his visitors.

"The game is ours!" he said. "I'll bring suit in the patent case to-morrow."

He was as good as his word. Before sundown of the next day John Somers was served with a summons to answer at court in defense of his claim to the Blake Cultivator patent, and to prove that it had been properly assigned to him by the patentee; on the suit of Andrew Blake, the surviving claimant.

We may pass rapidly over the succeeding period. Three months passed before the case came to trial, it being delayed on various pretenses. Meanwhile Somers had been obliged to obey the order of the court, and pay the damages awarded to the two injured boys.

"Twenty-five thousand shiners for that leg," said Andy, looking down at his injured member. "It's a big bunch o' money fur a little bit o' bone and meat, and I reckon maybe it's a square deal, long as I can stump it so lively. But I wouldn't sell t'other leg fer a million."

"Maybe you will get the million and keep your leg," suggested Kate.

"I don't keer if I do or no. I've got enough to keep what's left of me. I know what I'd sooner have than a million dollars."

"What is that?" asked Kate, innocently.

"I told you that day down by the river. You don't want me to tell you again?"

"Oh, you tease!" cried Kate, turning away with a rosy blush.

"I know what you promised that chap that wanted to buy you with a piece of paper," resumed Andy. "I'm going—"

"You're going to do nothing," she interrupted. "He didn't bring the paper, and I'm not sold.—And not for sale, either—even to a million-dollar buyer," she concluded.

"If you won't sell yerself, I s'pose you won't mind givin' yerself away," asked Andy, cunningly.

"That depends to whom."

"To me! Give me your hand, Kate."

She hesitated an instant, then with a smile and a blush, she laid her hand in his. It was their betrothal.

CHAPTER XV.

GLAD AND SAD SURPRISES.

TIME moved on, and in due time the great patent suit came up. Mr. Bryant had done his utmost for the defense, but he was working greatly in the dark. He did not know what line of proceeding the prosecution intended to take.

Somers had no fear of the result. The assignment of the patent was again duly in his own hands, properly signed and witnessed. As for the principal signer, he had long been "food for fishes." Of the two witnesses, one had disappeared from the city years ago. The other, Martin, was safe. It would not take a large outlay in dollars to purchase him—body and soul.

They did not know that Martin was already bought. And, there was another thing they did not know—that the second witness was back in town, and had fallen into the hands of the astute Phineas Clark.

It was through the aid of the two boys that this useful personage had been captured. They had overheard a conversation one night, between a man and a woman, in which the man acknowledged that it was he who had placed the bomb to blow up the Somers Agricultural Works.

"John Somers done me a dirty turn, when he sent me West, and promised to keep me in money, which he never did," declared the man. "I came back here to try and get even with him, and I didn't know no other way for a poor man to get even with a rich one."

"Why should he pay you to keep away?"

"You know well enough, Sal. There was something crooked in that paper he got me to sign. I'd squeeze him on that, but don't know how to go about it."

He soon learned how. The boys, who had overheard this incautious conversation, tracked the man to his home, or den, as it might better be called, and the next day made an early report of their important discovery to Mr. Clark.

Before noon the man was brought to his office, charged with the bomb explosion, and on promise of safety from prosecution told all he knew.

He acknowledged that he had signed a paper at the request of John Somers, who had afterward paid his way to Colorado, and promised to send him money from time to time. This he failed to do. For years the man had remained there, but at last, down in his luck, and broken by dissipation, he had tramped his way East, soon to get even with John Somers.

"That you will have a chance to do," said Clark. "Tell the truth about that signature, and you will hurt him more than by tin bombs."

"I'm your man. Count on me," answered the fellow.

We have given so much space to the preliminaries that there is no need to dwell long on the trial of the case. Clark had laid his plans so well and silently, that the unfolding of his side of the case came like a thunderbolt upon his antagonists.

But he was destined to a surprise as great as theirs. His case was still stronger than he supposed. An event happened during the trial that overwhelmed the lawyers, the principals and the court itself with astonishment, and effectually clinched the nails in the coffin of John Somers's fortune.

The defense had nothing to offer but the assignment, duly signed and witnessed, and the testimony of the only available witness, Martin Brown. They rested their case on this, putting the burden of proving fraud on the prosecution.

It proved a weak trust. Martin Brown was called by Mr. Clark as his first witness, and acknowledged without hesitation that he had not seen Andrew Blake sign the paper. He had signed his name as witness, at Mr. Somers's request; the signature was there; but he did not know it, and had not seen it made.

Mr. Bryant cross-examined him sharply, but without breaking the force of his testimony. By this time the court was in a fever of excitement. No one had expected such a revelation as this.

Mr. Somers, who was present, grew pale as death, and shook like a leaf.

But, he almost fell from his chair to the floor when Clark called his next witness. "William Bolton," and a man whom he instantly recognized advanced to the stand.

Had the past given up its dead? He had fancied this man had drank himself into the grave, years before; yet, here he stood in living flesh and blood!

Bolton's testimony was the same as Brown's. He had witnessed a signature which he had not seen made, and did not know. But his evidence became still more damaging to the defense when he told the story of his being supplied with money and sent to the West. It looked like an effort to get rid of a dangerous personage.

Mr. Bryant declined to cross-question the witness. He declared to the court that the fortune of his client could not be allowed to rest on the statement of two such men as these, one of whom, he could prove, belonged to the criminal class, while the other was a besotted tramp.

"It is somewhat surprising that Mr. Somers should have chosen two such men to witness an important document," retorted Mr. Clark. "If they were good enough to serve him as witnesses, they are good enough for me. I have still another witness, your Honor, and will rest my case on his testimony."

"William Mordaunt" was called, and the gentleman whom we have known by this name stepped up to the stand.

Mr. Clark himself did not know what evidence this witness was about to give. He had requested to be called, but had declined to say for what purpose.

The lawyer, and the court as well, were destined soon to be enlightened.

"What is your name?" was the first question asked.

"Andrew Blake!"

"Sir?" cried Clark, in astonishment. "Your name, I asked. Your name; not that of the prosecutor."

"I am the prosecutor, and I have given my true name," answered the witness, firmly. "My name is Andrew Blake—not William Mordaunt!"

By this time all the court was on its feet, in a state of irrepressible excitement. John Somers had sprung to his feet with the rest, the pallor of his face now changed to a deep purple. He stood but a moment; then, with a deep groan, sunk to the floor.

It took five minutes to quiet the excitement in the court. When order was once more established, some of the officers went to remove the fallen man. But he had recovered his senses, and rose feebly to his feet, waving them aside.

His bloodshot eyes once more sought the face of the witness; then, with a deep moan, as of pain, he turned toward the door.

"I am not well. I must seek the air!" he said.

No one interfered, and he walked from the court-room like one in a dream.

Phineas Clark, now fully alive to the situation, began his examination of the witness, whose every word was listened to with the most intense interest by judge, jury, lawyers, and audience alike.

His story was a plain one. His name was Andrew Blake, he repeated; he was the original inventor of the patent, and the father of the boy in whose name the suit was brought. He had not interfered in this, for the name was his own, and he held himself to be the real prosecutor.

He had not transferred the patent to John Somers. He had not signed the assignment. But he had been driven to despair by the villainy of his late employer, and had intended to commit suicide. He had changed his mind, however, and, leaving his hat and coat on the river-bank, had wandered away, scarce knowing what he did.

In the end he found himself in the Far West, where he had grown rich in mining, and had recently returned to his old home, filled with the desire for retribution.

Here he had found his son a cripple, maimed through what he believed to be the criminal action of his old enemy. What else had occurred had been done in the interest of justice, and he rested his claim on the justice of man and God.

It is not necessary to give at length the further proceedings of the court. It will suffice to go on to the verdict, which was the only one admissible under the evidence.

The jury pronounced the patent assignment a forgery, and affirmed that the patent, with all

the profit which had arisen from its manufacture, was the property of Andrew Blake, the original patentee.

Nothing was said as to the criminal liability of John Somers in the matter. That had nothing to do with the present case, but was a matter to be considered in the future.

For a man to be deprived of his wealth for many years by a forgery was not a matter to be settled by a fine, however large. Some other punishment was demanded for the thief and forger.

In fact, Mr. Mordaunt, or Andrew Blake, to give him his true name, lost no time in instructing his lawyer to take out a warrant of arrest for John Somers. This was done, but when an effort was made to serve it, a difficulty arose. Somers was not to be found.

He had not returned to the mill; he had not appeared at his home; no one had seen him since he had been observed walking away with faltering steps and distracted looks from the court-house.

What had become of him? Had he fled from the town? Had he made away with himself? These questions were destined to be strangely answered.

For the next morning, on the very spot in which Andrew Blake's coat and hat had been found fifteen years before, another coat and hat were found, which were recognized as those which had been worn by John Somers.

And before the day was over this indication was startlingly confirmed; the body of the mill-owner was washed up on the bank at a spot a mile down the stream.

The fact was evident. In his despair and alarm at the verdict, he had done what his victim was supposed to have done, fifteen years before—committed suicide. And, moved by a strange impulse, he had chosen for the fatal act the very spot that had long been pointed out as that of Blake's self-destruction.

That this fatal termination to the great patent case created an intense excitement in the town need not be said. There was not a person now but believed that the verdict of the jury was a just one, and when the Somers Agricultural Works were turned over, by order of the court, to Andrew Blake, all the citizens thought that no more than justice had been done.

No need to dwell at length on the subsequent events. Suffice to say, two happier boys than the crippled friends, Andrew Blake, Jr., and Richard Wilson, could not have been found in the land, and that they remained during all their lives the closest friends and intimates.

Crippled as they were, they were far from being past service. Andy's lame leg did not stand in the way of his being a very lively and efficient manager of the Agricultural Works, now his father's property. Nor did Dick's lame arm hinder him from becoming an energetic traveling salesman, nor in time from developing into the general out-door agent for the Blake Cultivator and the other products of the Works.

Andy's boy love did not fade away as he grew to manhood. He loved Kate Wilson with an ever-deepening affection, while her warm feeling for the playmate of her childhood grew into a love as deep and earnest as his own.

In the after time they were made man and wife, and as happy a pair as the land held. And when, in the course of time, Andrew Blake, the elder, died in good time, and was gathered to his fathers, his capable son became the sole proprietor of the works, while Dick Wilson, now a business man of wide experience, was raised to the post of general manager of the whole extensive establishment.

And so ends the story of the crippled parads, of the two boys whom fortune seemed to have crushed, but who, through lucky chance and native energy, became heir to fortune's highest gifts.

THE END.

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